

THE BENGHAZI
SCANDAL GROWS
STEPHEN F. HAYES • WILLIAM KRISTOL

the weekly

Standard

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THE IRANIAN REGIME AND ITS APOLOGISTS

REUEL MARC GERECHT

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A Slim Risk

THE SCRAPBOOK notes, without editorial comment, that Governor Chris Christie of New Jersey seems to have undergone a laparoscopic surgical procedure last February to reduce his stomach's capacity. The object of the operation is obvious—weight loss—but there seems to be some debate about why the governor chose to go under the knife, and whether he should have immediately informed the public when it took place.

On that latter question, THE SCRAPBOOK leans toward full disclosure. Governor Christie, in his characteristic way, dismissed such reasoning recently with a blunt none-of-your-business answer to reporters' questions. We can sympathize with the governor's desire to protect his privacy, and suspect a certain amount of embarrassment comes into play as well. But for good or ill, we live in an age when the health of important public officials is the people's business. Up to a point: There is no need for the public to be informed about minute details, or kept abreast of a politician's bout with the flu or seasonal allergies. But surgery of almost any kind is serious business, and the health of New Jersey's governor is of practical concern to the citizens of New Jersey.

So what about those of us not registered to vote in New Jersey? There seems to be near-universal agreement that Governor Christie's operation

means that he intends to lose weight, aspires to grow slimmer and trimmer in the next year or two—and so must be planning to run for the Republican nomination for president in 2016. Well, maybe. But such speculation puts Christie in an obvious quandary. If he follows the great American tradition of pretending that the office seeks the man, and not the other way

in heavily Democratic New Jersey has been blighted, to some minor degree, by malicious talk about his weight. Ex-governor Jon Corzine's campaign, for example, used to say things about Christie's girth which, if directed at his race or sexual orientation, would be regarded as bigotry. But given a choice between the portly-but-incorruptible Christie and a buff-but-sleazy Corzine, New Jersey voters wisely chose the bigger man.

Nor is it entirely clear that being overweight is a liability in politics. Many plus-sized figures in American history—Grover Cleveland, William Howard Taft, Wendell Willkie—are remembered with affection; and Bill Clinton's gaunt appearance since cardiac surgery tends to crowd out memories of the pudgy Bill Clinton who was twice elected president. Some surveys even suggest that being overweight is a slight advantage in a political contest, at least for men.

Which brings us to an undramatic conclusion: that Governor Christie was undoubtedly correct when he told reporters (and anybody else listening) that he underwent lap-band surgery for the sake of his family and his long-term health. This has the virtue of being, simultaneously, sensible and true. And it doesn't exclude the possibility of a sylph-like Christie—if such a creature is imaginable—looking ahead. ♦



Chris Christie

around, then he must insist that he is focused exclusively on serving as governor, and that running for president is the furthest thing from his mind. In which case, his insistence that he underwent the lap-band surgery exclusively for health reasons is politically astute.

In that sense, we commend the governor for his courage. Chris Christie's political career as a Republican

The Numbers Game

Our demographic understanding of the 2012 election continues to be fleshed out, most recently with a Census Bureau report. Some of the census findings merely confirm what we thought we knew. For instance, for all the talk about 2008 as a "historic" election, turnout, as a percentage of eligible voters, was actually down slightly that year from 2004.

Percentage turnout decreased

again in 2012, meaning that voter interest dramatically increased for three straight elections, going from 58.4 percent of eligible voters in 1996 to 63.8 percent in 2004; but it has now waned for two straight elections. This confirms suspicions that media enthusiasm for the Obama campaigns was somewhat out of sync with that of the general public.

The report's most intriguing findings, however, were about race. Non-Hispanic whites—you may have

heard this somewhere before—have steadily become a smaller percentage of voters since 1996. Whites usually overperform in elections—that is, their share of the vote typically exceeds their share of the electorate. In 1996, for instance, whites made up 79.2 percent of all eligible voters, but cast 82.5 percent of the votes.

White voters have steadily decreased their percentage in both categories. Yet they remain, by far, the biggest racial group—in 2012, 71.1

percent of eligible voters were non-Hispanic whites. And they continue to outperform as a group—in 2012 they made up 73.7 percent of all voters.

The most intriguing finding of the census, however, regards black voter turnout. Since 1996, the voter participation rates of white, Hispanic, and Asian voters have ping-ponged around, rising and dipping with no obvious trend lines. Black voters, on the other hand, have steadily increased the rate at which they vote. In 1996, 53 percent of eligible black voters went to the polls. That rate went on an uninterrupted climb and, in 2012, peaked at 66.2 percent—giving them the highest voter participation rate of any racial group in the election.

That massive increase in turnout—a 25 percent rise in the participation rate since 1996—is the biggest story of the 2012 campaign, from a political science standpoint. The question it raises is what happens next: Will the Obama presidency serve as a catalyst to permanently elevate the voter participation levels of African Americans? Or will we learn that Obama's power to motivate those voters was unique?

Postscript: In general, the Census Bureau does cracking good work, but they aren't immune from missteps. It was recently revealed that the census plans to remove a particularly important question from its American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS goes out to three million households a year and is one of the most robust and important tools we have for measuring and understanding American trends. The Census Bureau wants to strike a question about "number of times married" from the ACS.

It's unclear why "number of times married" is on the chopping block, but it shouldn't be. As Steven Ruggles, the director of the Minnesota Population Center, explains:

For those of us who study family demography, this change would be a major loss. The times married question is not only vital for understanding blended families, it is also necessary for basic studies of nuptiality and marital instability.... The ACS is the only reliable source currently available for national divorce



statistics. Without the number of times married, however, the divorce data will be badly compromised; for example, it will be impossible to construct a life table for first marriages, or to estimate the percentage of people who have ever divorced.

Removing the "number of times married" question would be a mistake—a big one. Here's hoping the good folks at the Census Bureau rectify it before it happens. ♦

package. New York governor Andrew Cuomo said the move was "insensitive at best."

Cuomo later issued a joint statement with New Jersey governor Chris Christie, proclaiming that "the people of our states can no longer afford to wait while politicians in Washington play games."

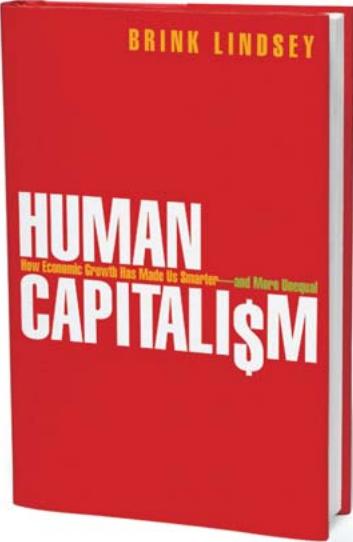
After the public shaming, Senate and House Republicans relented and passed a \$50.5 billion relief bill despite overwhelmingly credible claims the bill was stuffed with pork.

Nearly eight months after the disaster, that money has surely been wisely spent, right?

With thousands in New York still homeless from the storm, the *New York Times* reports:

Cuomo State of Mind

In late December 2012, congressional Republicans took enormous heat in the media for daring to reduce the size of the Hurricane Sandy aid



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—Tyler Cowen, author of *The Great Stagnation*

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The Cuomo administration has set aside nearly \$140 million for an advertising campaign called “New York State Open for Business,” with the money drawn largely from a state authority created to lower electricity bills and from federal disaster aid, records show. . . . A coming phase of the campaign will use \$40 million from the federal government to promote businesses and tourism in the areas struck by Hurricane Sandy.

The advertisements are set to the music of Jay-Z’s “New York State of Mind” and are voiced by Robert De Niro, who intones: “There’s a new New York State, one that’s working to attract businesses and create jobs.”

THE SCRAPBOOK submits that bullying Congress to pay for promotional ads doesn’t qualify as actually “working” to attract businesses, though it does create jobs for Madison Avenue types, not to mention Messrs. De Niro and Jay-Z.

If anything, the campaign underscores New York’s reputation for being antimarket and prone to cronyism. Indeed, using taxpayer funds intended for lower electricity bills and disaster relief to air primetime commercials will strike many as “insensitive at best,” to use Cuomo’s phrase.

THE SCRAPBOOK is happy to provide New York with some advice at a cost of \$140 million less than it’s paying for the new advertising campaign: If you spend disaster relief monies on disaster relief and don’t raid funds intended to provide aid to the needy to fund useless television commercials, your state might be viewed as a more attractive place to do business. ♦

Sentences We Didn’t Finish

“But the larger fault goes to Congress as a whole, including but not limited to [Rep. Darrell] Issa, for acting like moths to flames in their attraction to attack mode and scandal, real or purported, while avoiding like a cat who has sat on a hot stove the more important heat of . . .” (Norman J. Ornstein, *NY-Times.com*, May 9, 2013). ♦

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Death by Numbers

Rooting around in a bookstore not long ago, I stumbled upon a second edition of *Functions of a Complex Variable* (1917) by the Scottish mathematician Thomas MacRobert. Immediately I felt a chill, a sense of doom and foreboding, I had not experienced since youth. This was a dread mathematics text with which I had once wrestled, with limited success.

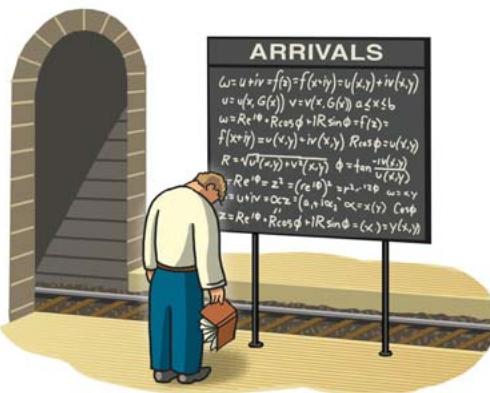
On a whim I bought it, transported it home, and proceeded to examine its introductory pages. As I expected, the text and mathematical symbols were almost wholly incomprehensible, and whatever knowledge (if that is the word for it) I may have once possessed—of differential equations and the functions of complex numbers, of inverse tangents and infinite products—was truly dead and gone.

Which was hardly a surprise. What did surprise me, however, was that I was willing to peruse its distasteful pages without ultimately depositing the volume in the fireplace. For if any one thing blighted my early education, and life, it was the scourge of mathematics.

I am now hurtling toward the middle of my seventh decade, and, as I like to point out, have never used anything beyond simple arithmetic in life: addition, subtraction, long division a few times a year, the mental calculation of percentages in restaurants. I have never boarded a train in Washington and headed west at a certain speed in order to discover where my friend, on an eastbound train from Los Angeles, might meet me in the Midwest. On the three or four occasions when I have been obliged to install floor tiles, I have been comforted to know that there are highly competent people who will do it for a fee.

CHRIS GALL

For whatever reason, and I suspect the explanation is neurological, mathematics is an unfathomable mystery to me. Its abstractions make no sense, its leaps of logic and deduction are inscrutable; its higher terminology might as well be Sanskrit. Numbers, indeed, are capricious in my experience: I have an autodidact memory for dates, but cannot remember a telephone number for more than a few seconds.



In a just world, of course, this mental aberration would be purely incidental; but we live in an unjust world. I never for a moment contemplated a career in engineering, or chemistry, or architecture; and yet my entire tenure as a student and undergraduate—all 16 years—was thoroughly, sometimes catastrophically, spoiled by the pedagogical infatuation with math. I always note, with despair, that proposals for education “reform” invariably feature more mathematics than before—and thank whatever gods may be that, at this point and at long last, it doesn’t apply to me.

In early childhood, I should say, I was competent in arithmetic, for what it’s worth. But when I arrived in middle school (1961) I was subject to something called the University of Maryland Mathematics Project (UMMaP)—an unholy juxtaposition

of math and computer jargon—which utterly, and decisively, defeated me. And since this was the “Mad Men” era, failure to master UMMaP was seen not as a mental quirk but a moral failing, a sign of delinquency or deep stupidity.

The theoretical premise of UMMaP was not to arrive at an answer but to demonstrate that the answer had been reached by an approved method. Well, I am a self-taught draughtsman, and much prefer to play the piano by ear. This was exactly the opposite of the way my mind works, and induced in my teachers not pity or even amuse-

ment but bewilderment, impatience, sometimes rage. Surely the low point of my middle-school incarceration was when I was summoned to stand facing the class while my teacher read aloud the unconventional means by which I had solved an equation—at the end of which he hurled an epithet in my direction, balled up the paper, and threw it into the wastebasket.

I am reminded of Mr. Benedik whenever the teaching “profession” is romanticized. But the fun didn’t stop there: When, late in my high school career, my Quaker prep school tossed me onto the pavement (“not college material”) it was largely because of mathematical ineptitude. Which explains, I suppose, why I do remember fondly the late Prof. Francisco Migliore of Villanova, who, despite a semicomical Italian accent (“square” was rendered as “squaw”), guided me through calculus and complex variables, enabling me to master just enough to pass exams—and join the rarefied ranks of Bachelors of Arts.

All of which is now utterly forgotten, except the pain, which is not. Example: I was once offered, and accepted, a plum job at the *Providence Journal*; but of course, if I had known that Providence is home to the American Mathematical Society, I would have turned it down flat.

PHILIP TERZIAN

Inaction and Deception

One of the many interesting subplots of the Benghazi saga involves the State Department's Accountability Review Board, which was asked by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to review State Department decisions before, during, and after the spontaneous demonstration—oops, terrorist attack—on the night of September 11, 2012. The board managed to conduct a review in which it chose not to interview several key figures in the Benghazi decision-making process, including—to take two rather obvious examples of people whom you'd think a review board might want to talk to—Secretary Clinton and Mark Thompson, the senior counterterrorism official at State. Thompson even volunteered to meet with the board, which decided not to take him up on the offer.

Having failed thoroughly to review what happened, the board produced a report that was somewhere between radically incomplete and positively misleading. It also—no surprise—failed to hold any high-ranking political appointees accountable for anything, while assigning culpability to four midlevel career civil servants. The board's performance was so egregious that it's now being investigated by the State Department Inspector General.

The White House doesn't have an inspector general, so there will be no investigation of the White House-led interagency Atrocities Prevention Board announced last year with much hoopla by President Obama. The board was established pursuant to his "Presidential Study Directive 10" of August 4, 2011. Who knew there was such a thing as a "Presidential Study Directive"? But if our nanny-state president constitutes, as Tocqueville put it, "a unique power, tutelary, all powerful, but elected by citizens . . . [who] console themselves for being in tutelage by thinking that they themselves have chosen their schoolmasters," we suppose it's fitting that the president issue study directives.

But this study directive wasn't just about more study. It called for action:



United States. Our security is affected when masses of civilians are slaughtered, refugees flow across borders, and murderers wreak havoc on regional stability and livelihoods. America's reputation suffers, and our ability to bring about change is constrained, when we are perceived as idle in the face of mass atrocities and genocide. Unfortunately, history has taught us that our pursuit of a world where states do not systematically slaughter civilians will not come to fruition without concerted and coordinated effort.

Unfortunately, the only concerted and coordinated effort the Obama administration has made to prevent atrocities in, say, Syria, has been . . . to set up the Atrocities Prevention Board. And the existence of said board seems to have had no effect in getting the U.S. government, or anyone else, to act to prevent atrocities in Syria or elsewhere.

This is the administration's foreign policy modus operandi: Obama's Accountability Review Board fails to hold any Obama appointee accountable, and Obama's Atrocities Prevention Board fails to prevent atrocities. The president ducks responsibility for the actions of his officials even as he ducks responsibility for what's happening in the world. In other words, Obama's foreign policy apparatus does what you'd expect, given the premises of his pretend-to-lead-from-behind-but-in-fact-don't-lead-at-all foreign policy.

Fortunately, Congress isn't bound by Obama's study directives or the findings of his administration's review boards. Obama administration appointees can be held accountable by elected officials in Congress exercising their investigative and oversight responsibilities. The House Oversight and Government Reform Committee got off to a good start with its Benghazi hearings. But it was only a start. It's now up to Congress to move ahead with the many tools at its disposal to insist on the truth about the failures and the subsequent cover-up of Benghazi. And it's also up to Congress to try to spur into action a president who would much rather talk about preventing atrocities than do something to prevent them. After all, as President Obama said in justifying the use of military force in his Nobel Peace Prize address,

LANDOV Preventing mass atrocities and genocide is a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the

“Inaction tears at our conscience and can lead to more costly intervention later.” Inaction abroad and deception at home. The Obama administration should be the subject of a study directive to ensure we never sink so low again.

—William Kristol

Define and Conquer

At his press conference last month, President Barack Obama employed a trope he often uses—that of a sociologist studying his opposition. Explaining how his agenda has stalled in the Senate, he said:

I can, you know, rally the American people around those . . . common-sense solutions. But ultimately, they, themselves, are going to have to say, we want to do the right thing.

And I think there are members certainly in the Senate right now . . . who understand that deep down. But they’re worried about their politics. . . . Their base thinks that compromise with me is somehow a betrayal. They’re worried about primaries. . . . And we’re going to try to do everything we can to create a permission structure for them to be able to do what’s going to be best for the country.

“Permission structure” is the sort of phrase one might hear in a course in the soft social sciences in Hyde Park. It is classic Obama, harking back to the 2008 Democratic primary when he attributed his struggles in small-town Pennsylvania to voters who had become embittered by their plight, clinging to God, guns, and xenophobia.

The similarities between these statements—and countless others from the Obama era—are not just in his pose as an analyst, but rather the frame of unreason he places on his opponents. In 2008, Hillary Clinton voters, blinded by their misfortunes, were unable to see how fantastic Obama was. Today, Republican voters nationwide are hamstringing their representatives because they hate the president so deeply. It’s not his fault; his agenda is only doing the right thing.

In a May 3 Q&A with the *New York Times*’s John Harwood, former Obama strategist David Axelrod put a demographic spin on the president’s analysis. When Harwood asked why gun background checks failed in the Senate, Axelrod responded, “The Republican Party today is, at its core, a mostly Southern, white, old, evangelical party.”

This is, at its core, false. A majority of Romney voters were from outside the Old Confederacy, under 65 years old, and not evangelical. But truth is not the point, nor is the purpose of Obama’s “permission structure” analysis merely to explain why his legislative program has stalled. Instead,

it is to define the president’s conservative opposition as *out* of the mainstream of American society. Obama’s opponents, so the logic goes, are so out to lunch that their opinions should not be taken seriously.

The Obama team employed this approach successfully in 2012. Mitt Romney may have been a family man who gave nearly \$2 million to his church in 2010, but by the time Team Obama finished defining him, he was a heartless plutocrat. It worked: The exit polls showed an electorate either split or tilted to the right on the top issues, with Obama defeating Romney because the latter simply was distrusted.

Social scientists call this the mobilization of bias. Marxists refer to it as the establishment of cultural hegemony. More plainly, it is a common trick pulled by Team Obama any time they are in a jam: Define your opponents in such a way that their views are not really taken seriously.

Of course, politicians are always trying this stunt. It makes sense to convince fickle swing voters that the opposition is just no good. Yet Obama’s attempts to mobilize bias stand out, for two reasons.

First is the total commitment to the strategy. Listen to any Obama flack long enough (usually just a matter of minutes), and he or she will reference how extreme the opposition is. Last month when discussing entitlements, Jay Carney said the president was looking for the “common-sense caucus.” And, of course, the media echo this: Last week *Politico* repeated the “common-sense caucus” phrase to report on the president’s golf game with Republican senators. The result is to paint conservatives as so far outside the mainstream that there is nothing that this president can do with them.

Second is the hypocrisy behind the tactic. This, after all, is the president elected because he promised to bring fundamental change to Washington. In *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama goes on at length about respecting the views of those who disagree with him, especially on abortion. Instead, we have sustained partisan warfare and a first-ever presidential address to Planned Parenthood, in which the president proclaims that the people whose views he once professed to respect are trying to return America to the 1950s.

His disclaimers lauding sensible centrism aside, Barack Obama is the most partisan president since at least Richard Nixon, and maybe even since Harry Truman. He seems to have a visceral dislike of his opponents, deep in his bones, and his political strategy since the spring of 2008 has been to win by disqualifying them altogether.

This suggests no grand bargain to deal with our looming problems will be forthcoming. There will be no Obama version of Ronald Reagan’s 1986 tax reform or Bill Clinton’s 1996 welfare reforms. Team Obama is so committed to partisan warfare that such a breakthrough seems improbable. Conservative reformers who desperately want to fix the nation’s broken public policy will just have to wait this hyper-partisan president out.

—Jay Cost

The Benghazi Scandal Grows

The State Department, the CIA, the White House . . . BY STEPHEN F. HAYES



Mark Thompson, Gregory Hicks, and Eric Nordstrom, preparing to testify on May 8

CIA director David Petraeus was surprised when he read the freshly rewritten talking points an aide had emailed him in the early afternoon of Saturday, September 15. One day earlier, analysts with the CIA's Office of Terrorism Analysis had drafted a set of unclassified talking points policymakers could use to discuss the attacks in Benghazi, Libya. But this new version—produced with input from senior Obama administration policymakers—was a shadow of the original.

The original CIA talking points had been blunt: The assault on U.S. facilities in Benghazi was a terrorist attack conducted by a large group of Islamic extremists, including some with ties to al Qaeda.

These were strong claims. The

CIA usually qualifies its assessments, providing policymakers a sense of whether the conclusions of its analysis are offered with "high confidence," "moderate confidence," or "low confidence." That first draft signaled confidence, even certainty: "We do know that Islamic extremists with ties to al Qaeda participated in the attack."

There was good reason for this conviction. Within 24 hours of the attack, the U.S. government had intercepted communications between two al Qaeda-linked terrorists discussing the attacks in Benghazi. One of the jihadists, a member of Ansar al Sharia, reported to the other that he had participated in the assault on the U.S. diplomatic post. Solid evidence. And there was more. Later that same day, the CIA station chief in Libya had sent a memo back to Washington, reporting that eyewitnesses to the attack said the participants were

known jihadists, with ties to al Qaeda.

Before circulating the talking points to administration policymakers in the early evening of Friday, September 14, CIA officials changed "Islamic extremists with ties to al Qaeda" to simply "Islamic extremists." But elsewhere, they added new contextual references to radical Islamists. They noted that initial press reports pointed to Ansar al Sharia involvement and added a bullet point highlighting the fact that the agency had warned about another potential attack on U.S. diplomatic facilities in the region. "On 10 September we warned of social media reports calling for a demonstration in front of the [Cairo] Embassy and that jihadists were threatening to break into the Embassy." All told, the draft of the CIA talking points that was sent to top Obama administration officials that Friday evening included more than a half-dozen references to the enemy—al Qaeda, Ansar al Sharia, jihadists, Islamic extremists, and so on.

The version Petraeus received in his inbox Saturday, however, had none. The only remaining allusion to the bad guys noted that "extremists" might have participated in "violent demonstrations."

In an email at 2:44 P.M. to Chip Walter, head of the CIA's legislative affairs office, Petraeus expressed frustration at the new, scrubbed talking points, noting that they had been stripped of much of the content his agency had provided. Petraeus noted with evident disappointment that the policymakers had even taken out the line about the CIA's warning on Cairo. The CIA director, long regarded as a team player, declined to pick a fight with the White House and seemed resigned to the propagation of the administration's preferred narrative. The final decisions about what to tell the American people rest with the national security staff, he reminded Walter, and not with the CIA.

This candid, real-time assessment from then-CIA director Petraeus offers a glimpse of what many intelligence officials were saying privately

Stephen F. Hayes is a senior writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

as top Obama officials set aside the truth about Benghazi and spun a fanciful tale about a movie that never mattered and a demonstration that never happened.

“The YouTube video was a non-event in Libya,” said Gregory Hicks, a 22-year veteran diplomat and deputy chief of mission at the U.S. embassy in Tripoli at the time of the attacks, in testimony before the House Oversight and Reform Committee on May 8. “The only report that our mission made through every channel was that there had been an attack on a consulate . . . no protest.”

So how did Jay Carney, Susan Rice, Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and others come to sell the country a spurious narrative about a movie and a protest?

There are still more questions than answers. But one previously opaque aspect of the Obama administration’s efforts is becoming somewhat clearer. An email sent to Susan Rice following a key White House

meeting where officials coordinated their public story lays out what happened in that meeting and offers more clues about who might have rewritten the talking points.

The CIA’s talking points, the ones that went out that Friday evening, were distributed via email to a group of top Obama administration officials. Forty-five minutes after receiving them, State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland expressed concerns about their contents, particularly the likelihood that Republicans in Congress would criticize the State Department for “not paying attention to Agency warnings.” CIA officials responded with a new draft, stripped of all references to Ansar al Sharia.

In an email a short time later, Nuland wrote that the changes did not “resolve all my issues or those of my building leadership.” She did not specify whom she meant by State

Department “building leadership.” Ben Rhodes, a top Obama foreign policy and national security adviser, responded to the group, explaining that Nuland had raised valid concerns and advising that the issues would be resolved at a meeting of the National Security Council’s Deputies Committee the following morning. The Deputies Committee consists of high-ranking officials at the agencies with responsibility for national security—including State, Defense, and the CIA—as well as senior White House national security staffers.

The Deputies Committee convened the next morning, Saturday the 15th. Some participants met in person, while others joined via a Secure Video Teleconference System (abbreviated SVTS and pronounced “siv-its”).

The proceedings were summarized in an email to U.N. ambassador Rice shortly after the meeting ended. The subject line read: “SVTS on Movie/Protests/violence.” The name of the sender is redacted, but whoever it was had an email address suggesting a job working for the United States at the United Nations.

According to the email, several officials in the meeting shared the concern of Nuland, who was not part of the deliberations, that the CIA’s talking points might lead to criticism that the State Department had ignored the CIA’s warning about an attack. Mike Morell, deputy director of the CIA, agreed to work with Jake Sullivan and Rhodes to edit the talking points. At the time, Sullivan was deputy chief of staff to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the State Department’s director of policy planning; he is now the top national security adviser to Vice President Joe Biden. Denis McDonough, then a top national security adviser to Obama and now his chief of staff, deferred on Rhodes’s behalf to Sullivan.

The email to Rice reported that Sullivan would work with a small group of individuals from the intelligence community to finalize the talking points on Saturday before



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sending them on to the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, which had originated the request for talking points.

The sender of the email spoke with Sullivan after the meeting, reminding him that Rice would be doing the Sunday morning shows and needed to receive the final talking points. Sullivan committed to making sure Rice was updated before the Sunday shows. The sender told Sullivan the name of the staffer (redacted in the email) who would be running Rice's prep session and encouraged the team to keep Rice in the loop.

At 2:44 p.m., the author of the email to Rice followed up directly with Sullivan, asking for a copy of the talking points to help with Rice's preparation for TV. Sullivan promised to provide them.

A senior Obama administration official did not challenge the accuracy of the email to Rice, but disputed any implication that Sullivan was responsible for rewriting the talking points.

"The CIA circulated revised talking points to the interagency after the Deputies Committee meeting and Jake Sullivan did not comment substantively on those points."

Petraeus expressed frustration at the new, scrubbed talking points, noting that they had been stripped of much of the content his agency had provided.

This official pointed to Jay Carney's comments this week. "What we said and what remains true to this day is that the intelligence community drafted and redrafted these points."

But Carney's claim raises an obvious question: Why would intelligence community officials want to redraft talking points they'd already finalized?

The major substantive changes came Friday evening, after a State Department official expressed concerns about criticism from Republicans, and Saturday morning, following the Deputies Committee meeting, where, according to internal Obama administration emails, officials further revised the talking points.

What's clear is that the final version did not reflect the views of the top intelligence official on the ground in Benghazi, who had reported days earlier that the assault had been a terrorist attack conducted by jihadis with links to al Qaeda, or the top U.S. diplomat in Libya, Gregory Hicks.

Hicks testified last week that he was not consulted on the talking points and was surprised when he saw Rice make a case that had little to do with what had happened in Benghazi. "I was stunned," he said. "My jaw dropped."

The hearings last week produced fresh details on virtually every aspect of the Benghazi controversy and

Enterprising States Are a Model for Growth

By Thomas J. Donohue

President and CEO
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

Last week the president kicked off a Jobs and Opportunity Tour in Austin, Texas—a city that's flourishing because state and local leaders have cultivated a good business climate and helped nurture a booming high-tech industry.

The president is smart to step outside of Washington to see how enterprising states, like Texas, are driving stronger economic growth and job creation despite many antibusiness and antigrowth policies coming from the federal government. These states' pro-growth policies are helping businesses succeed and people get back to work—and they are providing a good model for other state and national leaders on how to advance strong and competitive economies.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce just released its 4th annual *Enterprising States* study, which evaluates states' policies in five areas essential to jobs and

growth: exports and international trade, entrepreneurship and innovation, business climate, talent pipeline, and infrastructure.

We found the following common practices among economically thriving states:

Enterprising states create low-tax environments that attract businesses from around the country and enhance their competitiveness. They invest in infrastructure to keep people and commerce moving smoothly and efficiently. They encourage and reward innovation and welcome startups. They see the tremendous value of free trade and embrace it. They cultivate people through workforce development and strong schools. They keep regulations light and curb lawsuit abuse. They enable the private sector to responsibly develop energy resources. They take steps to attract and revitalize manufacturing. And their state leaders often work closely with local and regional economic development organizations to support entrepreneurship and business expansion.

States that are doing all or many of these things are more resilient and better

able to compete in the national and global economies. They have recovered much faster from the recession than states that haven't adopted pro-growth policies. And they are watching their state economies expand, their unemployment rates fall, opportunities rise for their residents, and prosperity spread more quickly across their cities and communities.

As the president maps out his ongoing Jobs and Opportunity Tour, he may find the *Enterprising States* study to be a useful guide. By visiting the states that are growing and prospering, he would get a firsthand look at what works. And he would quickly see that an agenda of higher taxes, heavier regulations, and unsustainable spending is exactly the wrong way to get more jobs and to create greater opportunity.

To see where each state ranks in jobs, economic growth, and competitiveness, visit www.EnterprisingStates.com.



U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
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raised new questions. By the end of some six hours of testimony, several Democrats on the committee had joined their Republican colleagues in calling for more hearings, additional witnesses, and the release of unclassified documents related to the attacks in Benghazi.

On May 9, House speaker John Boehner echoed the calls for those unclassified Benghazi documents to be made public. He had two specific requests. First, Boehner called for the release of an email from Beth Jones, acting assistant secretary for Near East affairs, sent on September 12. Jones wrote to her colleagues to describe a conversation she'd had with Libya's ambassador to the United States. When the Libyan raised the possibility that loyalists to Muammar Qaddafi might have been involved, Jones corrected him. "When he said his government suspected that former Gadhafi regime elements carried out the attacks, I told him that the group that conducted the attacks, Ansar al Sharia, is affiliated with Islamic terrorists." Among those copied on the email: Jake Sullivan, Victoria Nuland, Deputy Secretary of State Bill Burns, and Cheryl Mills, Hillary Clinton's chief of staff and longtime confidante.

Second, Boehner asked the White House to release the 100 pages of internal administration emails related to the drafting and editing of the talking points. Sources tell THE WEEKLY STANDARD that House Republicans will subpoena them if the administration does not turn them over voluntarily.

Two weeks ago, Secretary of State John Kerry said it was time to "move on" from Benghazi. More recently, Jay Carney suggested the same thing, explaining that Benghazi had happened "a long time ago."

But it's increasingly clear that congressional Republicans, and many Americans, will not move on until the outstanding questions about Benghazi are answered. ♦

Target: NRA

Caught in the media's crosshairs.

BY MARK HEMINGWAY

Houston

Was the National Rifle Association playing some sort of joke on the media? In the press room at the NRA's annual gathering at the Houston convention center was a large cheese plate laid out for the fourth estate's snacking pleasure. It wasn't just a proletarian platter of cheddar cubes, either. There was brie and lots of chalky bits that contained herbs and looked like they'd been aged in caves in France. I couldn't identify all the varieties because, like most journalists, I'm not nearly as sophisticated as I like to think I am. But it sure seemed as if the NRA was subtly reminding the media of the class differences between the cheese-eating liberals who populate newsrooms and the gun owners out in the real 'Merica.

It turns out I was the one making unjustified assumptions. With 5 million members nationwide and 86,000 people attending the convention in Houston, the NRA cuts across pretty much all strata of American life. Shortly after encountering the cheese plate, I walked past a booth on the convention floor for the NRA Wine Club. "Selections include a perfectly balanced, nicely concentrated extraordinary Pinot Noir which is both floral and fruitful, a charming and silky French Bordeaux blend and a versatile California Cabernet Sauvignon that showcases impressions of blackberry, dark cherry and cocoa." Nice pairings for, yes, a cheese plate.

The NRA offers an incredible array of services to members that have nothing to do with guns—if you ever need a reverse mortgage, the NRA can help. Across acres of convention space, there were civic and charitable organizations

doing all sorts of admirable things for veterans, handicapped people, and at-risk youth. You couldn't walk 10 feet without tripping over reams of gun safety information, and there were almost as many vendors selling gun safes and other devices to secure firearms as there were guns and ammo manufacturers. Yes, there were thousands of guns on display, but this wasn't a conventional gun show. Live ammunition and guns weren't for sale, and they were all under glass or attached to display cases for safe handling.

Most people haven't read anything about the NRA that doesn't begin and end with its supposed culpability in mass shootings. As the news reports started coming back from the NRA convention, it was clear the media, still reeling from the failure of gun control legislation in the Senate, were out to exact their revenge. NPR went with the headline "At NRA Convention, Dueling Narratives Displayed With Guns." Dueling, however, implies an equal fight. In fact, there were about 20-40 antigun protesters across the street and some 86,000 Second Amendment boosters inside the convention center. Yet NPR chronicled the protesters in comically florid prose: "As the young woman, raw with emotion, stands in the wind, thousands of people stream by without noticing her, eager to get inside to the convention."

Though no honest person would contend that the NRA crowd was anything but exceptionally polite and orderly, journalists venturing inside the convention did their best to discredit the NRA by going freak hunting. Some of this was more odd than objectionable—see BuzzFeed's slideshow "The 20 Most Important Beards at the NRA Convention." But among thousands of attendees and over a thousand vendors hawking every

Mark Hemingway is a senior writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

imaginable gun-related product, finding a few objectionable people was a mathematical certainty. Sure enough, some yahoo was selling a target that looked like a zombie Obama. The NRA quickly moved to ban it from the convention, but not before every media outlet on the planet picked up the story and Al Sharpton let loose on MSNBC.

Amid the hyperbole and irrational hatred of gun ownership, there might have been a legitimate story. Based on the wares at this year's NRA convention, the gun industry has a faddish and lamentable obsession with zombie- and video game-inspired products. You could say the same of the movie industry, though.

Meanwhile, the media did their level best to prove they were not in a position to look down their nose at gun owners. *Guardian* columnist Ana Marie Cox took aim at NRA keynote speaker Glenn Beck and misfired badly. Beck "let loose with a metaphor regarding the 'full armor of God' astonishing for its cohesiveness, if not its imagery: '[W]e will fight by strapping on the full armor of God. We will stand firm with the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit.'" Beck says many ill-advised things, but the fact Cox didn't know he was quoting a well-known passage from Ephesians suggests she's not the person to put him in his place.

Elsbeth Reeve of the *Atlantic Wire* wrote an even more preposterous account of the convention, illustrated with unflattering animated GIFs and conjuring the image of watching Sarah Palin "barf." Noted Reeve: "Several speakers devoted part of their speeches to media criticism, saying the big bad MSM had been mean to them. . . . 'Acronyms,' Sarah Palin said, like MSNBC, CBS, ABC, 'one day they will think themselves accursed that they were not in this fight with us.'" If that hick Moosetown mayor doesn't think much of the media, it might be because when she quotes Shakespeare it flies over the heads of writers at one of America's oldest journalism outlets.

Reeve wasn't wrong in noting that

"our terrible media" was the unofficial theme of the NRA convention. "God forbid that anyone says anything the media elitists don't want to hear. Those in the media, yeah, you know what I'm talking about, they think they know better than we do. They think they're smarter than we are," NRA executive vice president Wayne LaPierre said a few hours before Palin took the stage. "During the past few months the media's engaged in a vicious effort to attack the Second Amendment and demonize lawful American gun owners."

If the media really cared about passing additional gun control measures, it might behoove them to dial back their contempt. Even though new gun regu-



Get your zombie targets here.

lations failed in the Senate, a number of Republicans in politically perilous positions, such as Arizona senator Jeff Flake, have made it known they're still very willing to consider expanding background checks and other new gun restrictions.

But as West Virginia Democratic senator Joe Manchin, one of the primary drivers of a recent Senate bill to expand background checks, told the *Atlantic* last week, the strident posture of gun control advocates is doing more harm than good. He insists "there's a lot the NRA likes in [the Toomey-Manchin gun] bill." By contrast, he's made it clear President Obama and New York mayor Michael Bloomberg's efforts to shame the NRA and gun control opponents have been counterproductive to getting gun legislation passed.

"If you were in a state such as West Virginia or North Dakota or Arkansas, which is a rural state and it's mostly gone red in national elections, how

would you approach that? Would you say, 'I'm going to beat Joe Manchin up because he didn't vote the way he should have?'" Manchin told the *Atlantic*'s David Graham. "Or would you say, 'I'm going to appeal to law-abiding gun owners in the state,' and give me enough support from my constituents that I don't have to do hand-to-hand combat with?"

If Manchin wants the gun control crowd to start appealing to law-abiding gun owners, he's got his work cut out for him. The night before he bemoaned the inability to forge a consensus on new gun measures, his Senate colleague, Connecticut Democrat Chris Murphy, appeared on Rachel Maddow's MSNBC show and said the following: "The Second Amendment is not an absolute right, not a God-given right, it has always had conditions upon it like the First Amendment has. The idea that the Second Amendment was put in there in order to allow citizens to fight their government is insane. . . . The Second Amendment is not designed to allow the citizenry to arm itself against the government."

A United States senator went on national TV and denied the plain historical fact of armed rebellion of citizens against an unjust government as the reason for America's founding, not to mention the clear justification of the Second Amendment. And if you don't trust a guy like Chris Murphy not to infringe on your constitutional rights, well, clearly you're "insane." True to her commitment as a media watchdog, Rachel Maddow forged ahead, uncritical of what Murphy said.

So long as the media and gun control advocates keep brandishing their ignorance, demonizing the opposition, and treating the NRA as a fringe special interest as opposed to one of the nation's largest and most enthusiastically supported grassroots groups, creating compromise and passing any new gun control measures in Washington seems unlikely. This may compound the vitriol in an already tense gun debate, but for now the NRA is all too happy to offer its critics some cheese with their whine. ♦

Are Universities Above the Law?

The great unscrutinized institutions of our time. **BY PETER BERKOWITZ**

Corporate governance is a much-discussed topic, and the operation of corporations has proven a fertile field for investigative journalism. But even though many colleges and universities are multibillion-dollar-a-year operations, the subject of university governance has been largely neglected. This is unfortunate because university governance raises fascinating questions of great public interest involving the complex intersection of law, morals, and education. *Nasar v. Columbia* is a case in point.

On May 6, Columbia University submitted a motion to dismiss a lawsuit filed against it in mid-March in the Supreme Court of New York by Sylvia Nasar, the John S. and James L.

Knight professor of business journalism at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.

Nasar's complaint alleges, among other things, that "from 2001-2011, Columbia illegally misappropriated and captured for its

own purposes income generated by a \$1.5 million charitable endowment" established by the Knight Foundation. Columbia contends that Nasar's suit is without merit and that even if all her allegations were true, the university could not be found to be in violation of the law. But if all of Nasar's

allegations are true and the courts of New York are unable to grant relief, it would mean that New York state law permits university administrations to disregard their written agreements with impunity and behave deceitfully when called to account.

A distinguished *New York Times* journalist and author of the Pulitzer Prize-nominated biography *A Beautiful Mind* (made into a major Hollywood film), Nasar was appointed in 2001 to the Knight chair as a tenured Columbia professor. She has built an esteemed program in business journalism at

Columbia and in 2011 published the bestselling *Grand Pursuit: The Story of Economic Genius*.

Nasar learned of irregularities in Columbia's management of Knight chair funds in 2010. She protested to Columbia and alerted the Knight

Foundation, which promptly initiated an audit performed in the autumn of 2010 by Big Four accounting firm KPMG. According to the KPMG audit,

"it appears that the Graduate School of Journalism did not abide by the original terms and spirit of the grant agreement." The audit concluded that at least \$923,000 of expenditures were "unallowable" and claims against Columbia could total as much as \$4.5 million.

The original Knight Foundation agreement with Columbia provided that endowment income should be used specifically "for additional salary and benefits to the base salary" (emphasis added) of the holder of the Knight chair and "to support the chairholder's program of research and service." The agreement also stipulated that "the base salary and benefits of the Knight Chairholder shall be provided by the Donee [Columbia] (from funds other than those earned from the Knight Endowment Grant)." In fact, as the KPMG audit shows and as Columbia acknowledges, the journalism school did

use endowment income, in violation of the agreement, to pay Nasar's base salary and not to supplement her base salary or support her research. In addition, Nasar's complaint alleges that Columbia repeatedly dissembled about misappropriated funds and that, after Nasar discovered Columbia's misuse of Knight chair monies, Nicholas Lemann, the dean of the journalism school, sought to intimidate her into keeping silent.

In response to an email I sent to Lemann (who will be stepping down on June 30 after 10 years as dean) seeking his views on the lawsuit, associate dean for communications Elizabeth

Peter Berkowitz is the Tad and Dianne Taube senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, and author of the new book Constitutional Conservatism: Liberty, Self-Government, and Political Moderation.



GARY LOCKE

Fishman replied that “we don’t comment on matters in litigation.” That is to be expected and is unexceptionable. The last thing lawyers want is for clients to inadvertently reveal sensitive facts, disclose legal strategies, or antagonize judges.

Nasar’s allegations, however, are disturbingly familiar. They reflect a tendency at our leading universities to avoid transparency and disdain accountability. This tendency cultivates in administrators and professors an imperiousness in the wielding of power and in professors and students a submissiveness in the face of power. This tendency and the vices it nurtures are no less a threat to the goal of liberal education—forming individuals fit for freedom—than are the corruption of the curriculum and the imposition of ideological conformity that characterize today’s campuses.

The avoidance of transparency and the disdain for accountability can be seen, for example, in *Robertson v. Princeton*. In December 2008, Princeton University settled a lawsuit brought in 2002 by Robertson Foundation trustee William Robertson. The lawsuit alleged that Princeton diverted hundreds of millions of dollars that were restricted by the terms of the Robertson Foundation’s agreement with Princeton. William Robertson contended that instead of using the money to support students planning to enter government service, particularly in the field of international relations, as called for in the agreement, Princeton put the funds to a wide variety of other uses that had nothing to do with the foundation’s stated purpose.

In its conduct surrounding *Association of Alumni of Dartmouth College v. Trustees of Dartmouth College*, Dartmouth similarly showed itself averse to transparency and accountability. In 2007, led by reform-minded members, the Association of Alumni of Dartmouth College filed a lawsuit to prevent President James Wright from packing the board of trustees with handpicked members friendly to the administration. After the complaint survived Dartmouth’s motion to dismiss but before the case went to trial, the

Dartmouth administration exploited its tightly held information about college alumni to successfully champion a new slate of candidates to the alumni association. Upon winning election, the reconstituted alumni board promptly withdrew the lawsuit.

And disregard for transparency and accountability was on prominent display in 2006 after three Duke University lacrosse players were falsely accused of raping an African-American woman. University professors were quick to publicly vilify the accused student athletes, and high administration officials, including Duke University president Richard Brodhead, seemed to presume their guilt. Eventually, Duke reached an out-of-court settlement with the indicted lacrosse players while disgraced district attorney Mike Nifong was disbarred for grossly unprofessional conduct.

In each of these cases extraordinary measures were necessary to compel universities to honor elementary considerations of good governance and fair process. There is no reason to suppose that the conduct in question is exceptional; indeed, given the opacity of university decision-making and universities’ insulation from accountability, it is likely that these cases represent the tip of the iceberg.

Courts are legitimately wary about adjudicating university controversies, out of concern for academic freedom and a reluctance to substitute judges’ judgment about essentially academic issues for the judgment of professors and administrators. The Princeton, Dartmouth, and Duke cases, however, do not revolve around academic freedom or essentially academic issues. Rather, they deal with the ordinary business of courts, which is determining whether parties have abided by their agreements, guidelines, and promises. The same is true of Sylvia Nasar’s lawsuit against Columbia.

One of the central legal questions raised by Nasar’s lawsuit concerns the effect of a curious 2011 agreement between the Knight Foundation and Columbia. For some reason, despite the findings of the KPMG audit, the Knight Foundation decided to forgive

10 years and perhaps millions of dollars of documented misappropriations by Columbia; it also chose to alter the terms of the endowment to substantially reduce support for the Knight chair. Nasar argues that while the 2011 agreement legitimately changes Columbia’s obligations going forward, it cannot retroactively alter Columbia’s obligations in earlier years. She contends that she is entitled as holder of the Knight chair since 2001 to substantial damages as a specific beneficiary and as a third-party beneficiary of the original endowment grant agreement contract between Columbia and Knight that was in effect until 2011.

Regardless of whether the courts find a legally cognizable injury in the case of *Nasar v. Columbia*, the educational question demands the closest examination: Can a university, which operates as a public trust, be trusted to prepare its journalism students to shoulder the responsibilities of the press in a free society if it cannot be trusted to deal honorably with, and respect its formal obligations to, its faculty? So too does the question of university governance to which the *Nasar* case gives rise require careful consideration: What steps can universities, many with endowments in the billions and even tens of billions of dollars, take to ensure—and to assure members of the university community and the public—that they are using gifts consistent with donors’ intent?

Perhaps the distinguished journalist Paul Steiger—managing editor of the *Wall Street Journal* from 1991 to 2007, and founder and executive chairman of *ProPublica*, a prize-winning online news organization devoted to investigative journalism in the public interest—might be induced to weigh in on these important questions about universities and their legal, moral, and educational obligations. And perhaps Columbia University’s commencement ceremony later this month might provide just the occasion. That’s when Steiger, who is also both a Knight Foundation trustee and good friend of Columbia Journalism School’s Dean Lemann, receives a Doctor of Laws honorary degree from Columbia. ♦

The Amnesty Next Time

The specter of 1986 haunts the immigration debate. **BY FRED BARNES**



Immigration office in Houston: amnesty, 1980s-style

In 1986, three million illegal immigrants in the United States were given the right to become citizens. It was a full-scale amnesty, created by a bipartisan majority in Congress and signed into law by President Reagan. It had one big flaw.

The amnesty went into effect immediately. And strong measures to secure the border with Mexico and prosecute employers who hired illegals were to follow. The goal was to stop illegal immigration once and for all, while allowing those here illegally to stay.

But strengthened enforcement never happened—that was the flaw—and the bill produced a perverse result. Rather than halt the flow of illegal immigrants, the 1986 law actually spurred millions more to come. Crossing the border was easy, jobs were plentiful, and the chance of being deported

was slim, including for those who overstayed their temporary visas.

Now, with 11 million illegals in the country, the 1986 law is anything but forgotten. It has given opponents of comprehensive immigration reform a potent argument for modifying the Senate bill drafted by the so-called Gang of Eight (four Democrats and four Republicans) or killing it altogether.

When the Senate Judiciary Committee met last week to begin considering the bill, the 1986 legislation was the first matter to come up. "This bill looks too much like the 1986 bill," Sen. Chuck Grassley said. He is the senior Republican on the committee.

Grassley was a freshman senator from Iowa in 1986 and voted for the law, known as Simpson-Mazzoli after its cosponsors, Republican senator Alan Simpson of Wyoming and Democratic representative Romano Mazzoli of Kentucky. "I was one of those who

made that mistake," he said. "I don't want to make that mistake again."

Grassley objected to the provision in the Gang of Eight's bill that would give the 11 million legal status when the bill goes into effect—that is, before the border security and enforcement parts are fully implemented. So did Alabama's Jeff Sessions: "This is how we got taken to the cleaners" in 1986, he grumbled.

"If we pass the bill as is, there will be no pressure on this administration or a future administration or those in Congress to secure the border," Grassley said. "There will be no push by the legalization advocates to get that job done. We need to get together to secure the border first. . . . The American people have a right to demand we get it right this time."

His remedy is to require the secretary of homeland security to certify the border has been under effective control for six months. Then, the 11 million could become "resident provisional immigrants" legally in the United States and free from being deported. To achieve such control, the border would need "100 percent visibility" by the border patrol and a capture rate of 90 percent of border crossers.

The response of the bill's backers on the judiciary committee—10 Democrats, 2 Republicans—was less than compelling. Democrat Dianne Feinstein of California noted how much border security has been improved. "I'm amazed at the progress being made." Republican Jeff Flake of Arizona, a member of the Gang of Eight, said illegal residents live "in the shadows, and we've got to bring them out. To delay that process would not be the right approach." Democrat Chuck Schumer of New York claimed the requirement to secure the border first "would delay probably forever bringing people out of the shadows."

Perhaps Republican Marco Rubio of Florida, the chief spokesman for the Gang of Eight, could have defended the bill more persuasively. But he can't participate in the "markup" of the bill. He's not a member of the committee.

When the committee voted, Grassley's amendment lost, 12-6. But the

Fred Barnes is executive editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

AP / PAM MACDONALD

issue of the 1986 law and delaying legalization until the border is secure won't go away. On the day of the markup, I interviewed Republican Bob Goodlatte of Virginia, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee. Even before I asked a question, he said, "We need to learn the lesson of the 1986 legislation."

That means adopting the Grassley approach. House Republicans are wedded to the idea of "border security first, legalization second." And Goodlatte said he wants to produce an immigration bill—or a series of bills—that most House Republicans will vote for. That's probably impossible unless legalization is delayed.

But here's the rub. Democrats are insistent on legalization first. That's why it's part of the Gang of Eight's bill. That's why a House group, also four Democrats and four Republicans, hasn't reached agreement on a bipartisan measure.

Homeland Security secretary Janet Napolitano is no help. Republican senator John Cornyn of Texas accused her of declaring victory in the effort to secure the border. What she actually said was this: The border "is as secure now as it has ever been." Nobody believes that, Cornyn said. None of the Democrats jumped to her defense.

She is distrusted, at least by Republicans. So is Obama, who has sharply narrowed enforcement of current immigration laws. Ignoring Congress on immigration isn't new. Goodlatte cited a 1995 law authorizing an electronic system to flag expired visa holders. "That's never been put into effect," he said. The same point was made repeatedly at the Senate session.

The bipartisan Senate bill will surely survive the skepticism of Republicans on the Judiciary Committee. But its advocates need to find better answers to questions raised by critics, Jeff Sessions in particular.

Sessions is tough and smart and always prepared for debate. He asked Schumer, "Do you dispute the fact that we will probably legalize over 30 million [immigrants] in the next 10 years?" "Yes, I do," Schumer said. Okay, Sessions replied, what's the correct number? He never got an answer. ♦

Eggs for Sale?

Brace yourself for the human embryo market.

BY WESLEY J. SMITH

If you want to know what's going to go wrong in the culture, read the professional journals. A case in point: An article in the April 10 *New England Journal of Medicine* called for the creation of a commodities market for "made-to-order" human embryos.

The authors, I. Glenn Cohen and Eli Y. Adashi—university professors, of course—treat embryos as the equivalent of a prize cattle herd. They note that sperm and eggs are already bought and sold for in vitro fertilization (IVF) and, further, that New York legalized buying eggs for use in biotechnological research a few years ago. Hence, "it is not clear" (an oft-used phrase in bioethical advocacy that frees the author from actually having to prove a point) why we should not also allow companies to make "made-to-order embryos" for profit, since that activity would be "more similar to the sale of gametes than the sale of children."

As a matter of basic biology, that isn't true: A human embryo is an organism, a nascent human being, while an egg or sperm is just a cell. But what's a little sophistry in the cause of deconstructing ethics? After all, to use a movie idiom, *there's gold in them thar hills!*

The authors engage in misdirection by focusing on special-order embryos as just another service to be offered in the already ethically wide-open infertility industry. But expanding IVF opportunities isn't really what their proposal is about. Rather, the primary customers of a future embryo manufacturing industry would be biotech companies and their university affiliates, which would pay top dollar

Wesley J. Smith is a senior fellow at the Discovery Institute's Center on Human Exceptionalism. He also consults with the Patients Rights Council and the Center on Bioethics and Culture.

for merchandise possessing desired genetic traits, just as they now do for genetically engineered research mice.

But designing the embryo product line will not be easy. Fertilization is an inexact process. Sure, some desired attributes—sex or certain genetic defects—could be obtained through using specifically selected or altered eggs or sperm and genetic testing of embryos to find those that possess the desired characteristics. But made-to-order embryos would be hit and miss, limiting the industry's growth potential.

The real money would come from human cloning, which would permit the manufacture of tailor-made, genome-specific embryos—and in theoretically virtually unlimited numbers. Indeed, the authors give away the game when they write, "It is not clear how the sale of made-to-order embryos differs from the sale of oocytes [eggs] for the manufacture of embryos by somatic-cell nuclear transfer"—SCNT being the cloning process used to make Dolly the sheep. In other words, an egg is a fertilized embryo is a cloned embryo, with each presenting distinct mercantile potential.

Advocacy of this sort arouses the suspicion that human cloning must be getting very close. Further evidence comes from California, where a bill aimed at increasing the number of human eggs available for use in experiments easily passed the Assembly on May 2, 54-20. The bill, AB-926 aims to repeal the ban on paying women to supply eggs for research (beyond expenses) and allow university or other institutional review boards to establish compensation rates to pay women for their "time, discomfort, and inconvenience."

"Discomfort" is a tactful word for what women experience when submitting to mass egg extraction. The

process—known as superovulation—requires administering supercharged doses of hormones that stimulate the ovaries to release 20 to 30 eggs in a cycle, instead of the usual 1 or 2. After that, the donor's (or seller's) eggs are harvested under anesthesia via a needle inserted through the vaginal wall.

Most extractions do not harm the egg supplier. But some women are wounded: Potential side effects include infection, the swelling of ovaries to the size of a melon, infertility, stroke, some cancers, and, in rare cases, even death.

Why the sudden need for eggs in biotech? They are the essential ingredient in cloning, one egg per cloning attempt. And since women are far less likely to risk superovulation to make cloned embryos for use in experiments than they are to enable the birth of a baby, research eggs are currently in very short supply. Indeed, this “egg dearth” has materially impeded the development of cloning, which has scientists champing at the bit to obtain a bounteous supply. If—or when—human cloning is finally accomplished, egg demand will go vertical. Scientists are unlikely to have access to a sufficient supply unless they pay.

AB 926 will also provide new business opportunities for the infertility industry by allowing qualified IVF companies to sell embryos and eggs “in excess of those needed for fertility.” Not only that, but the bill authorizes institutions to pay more to the IVF companies than they pay women directly, so long as the patient undergoing infertility treatment decides she does not need them “for her own reproductive success.” Once she signed a waiver, the clinic would be entitled to sell the remaining eggs or embryos for research at whatever price the market would bear. Talk about creating a financial incentive to make excess quantities.

There's an irony here. Those pushing for egg and embryo selling tend to be on the political left, e.g., politicians and advocates who claim to be most supportive of “choices” for women. Indeed, assemblywoman Susan Bonilla, the author of AB 926, claims that the

bill is about guaranteeing “equal treatment” for women in research.

But establishing egg and embryo commodities markets would actually lead to unequal exploitation opportunities for buyers. Those lining up to be superovulated for pay are unlikely to be members of the professional class. Rather, they would primarily be the poor and/or unemployed, women in such dire financial need that they are willing to risk their health, fecundity, and lives for a relatively small stipend. The real money in the embryo/egg industry would be made by the companies and scientists who succeeded in using the reproductive substances of women and embryonic cells to achieve fame and fortune.

And if eggs and embryos can be transformed into commodities, once

artificial wombs are developed, why not also create a market in human fetuses? Scientists are already experimenting with the ovaries of later-term aborted female fetuses to determine if they can be used as sources of eggs. If fetal organs ever prove to be useful in transplant medicine, companies manufacturing genetically designed fetuses for harvest could be worth a fortune.

I can imagine an advocacy article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* 10 years or so from now asserting: “It is not clear how the sale of made-to-order fetuses differs ethically from the sale of made-to-order embryos or oocytes.” Why not? Once we demolish ethical barriers against the commercialization of nascent human life, there would be no end to the entrepreneurial possibilities. ♦

Two Strikes . . .

The logic of Israel's Syria policy.

BY LEE SMITH

Israel's two strikes inside Syria in early May underscored its primary strategic concern in the ongoing Syrian civil war and throughout the Middle East. Jerusalem first struck on May 3, targeting a shipment of Iranian missiles at the Damascus International Airport that were destined for Hezbollah in Lebanon. Two days later, the Israeli Air Force zeroed in on a dozen sites around the Syrian capital housing Iranian arms and guarded by Iranian troops. For Israel, countering Iran and its proxies is the issue that matters.

It's different for the White House. There it's all talk all the time—the Obama administration says something is unacceptable, and then accepts it. For the last month, administration officials have kept critics and the

media off balance with lawyerly verbiage. The president drew a red line last August over Assad's use of chemical weapons but, as aides leaked to the press, he didn't mean to. And it doesn't matter anyway because even if the U.S. intelligence community concluded, along with British, French, and Israeli assessments, that chemical weapons were used in March, how do we know who used them? Assad or the rebels? We'll revisit the issue when we have, as Obama put it, a “chain of custody.”

Israeli analysts point to the evidence that Iran has backup plans to ensure its position in Syria even if its key Arab ally, Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, is driven from power. It's not clear that the White House even wants Assad gone. Secretary of State John Kerry announced last week plans to convene a peace conference with the Russians. The joint American-Russian formula, one White House official told

Lee Smith is a senior editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

the *Washington Post*'s David Ignatius, "is that Assad will step aside 'as part of a political process once a transitional governing body is formed.'" Assad's departure then isn't a precondition, but an outcome of the process. Now all Kerry has to pull off is the magic trick of making the Russians abandon Assad after two years of staunch support.

But why would the Russians do that, especially as the White House seems to be bending toward the Russian position? A report last week from the Abu Dhabi-based newspaper the *National* recounts a meeting between U.S. intelligence officers and Syrian rebel leaders. The Americans, explained Free Syrian Army officials, wanted them to take on Jabhat al-Nusra, the al Qaeda affiliate that the administration has designated a foreign terrorist organization. When the rebels explained that they'd prefer not to fight other outfits fighting Assad, the American officer responded: "We'd prefer you fight al Nusra now, and then fight Assad's army. You should kill these Nusra people. We'll do it if you don't." It's hard to think of anything that would please Assad and his Russian backers more than an internecine battle among Syria's Sunni rebels.

With the administration waffling on Obama's red line over Assad's use of chemical weapons, it's hardly surprising that some Israeli officials increasingly wonder about the reliability of Obama's promise to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. For instance, if Obama doesn't think his own intelligence community has the whole story on Syrian chemical weapons, what is going to make him act on their assessment if they say Iran is on the verge of a nuclear breakout?

But maybe it won't matter. Israel's raids on Iranian targets in Syria suggest it might be enough if, when it comes time to go after Iranian nuclear facilities, Obama just stays out of the way. Sure, the United States has a lot more firepower but, like good china, planes and payloads are only relevant if you use them. Iran's air defenses may be more daunting than Syria's. But the Israelis have shown repeatedly that when they are determined

to do something, they find a way.

In Israel's 30-year conflict with the Islamic Republic and its proxies, Jerusalem has never lost a significant engagement. Western policymakers and analysts may have swallowed Hassan Nasrallah's line that Hezbollah earned a "divine victory" in its 2006 war with Israel, but the nearly seven years of quiet Israel has enjoyed on its northern border has proven otherwise. The Israeli strikes in Syria aimed to preserve that northern peace and prevent the balance of power from shifting to Iran or its clients.

It's perhaps useful to see the Iranian nuclear program in this context. When the clerical regime threatens to destroy Israel, it should be taken at its word. But a nuclear strike is not the only threat. The prospect of Iran's proxies growing strong enough to win an engagement with Israel is a very real danger as well. What could change the equation is not just a doomsday device allowing Hezbollah to operate under a nuclear umbrella, but also lesser weapons, like the strategic missiles Israel just destroyed in Syria.

The Iranian nuclear program is not a stand-alone threat. The White House doesn't want Iran to have the bomb because it knows that both Israel and the Arabs, especially the Persian Gulf sheikhdoms, are threatened. An Iranian bomb would also undermine a half-century of American hegemony in the Persian Gulf and possibly disrupt the flow of energy resources that U.S. allies and trading partners rely on. But, from Obama's perspective, those problems are way off in the future, and in the meantime he is not about to risk his legacy by committing U.S. forces to the Middle East. Besides, he still seems to think that there's a deal to be had with the Iranians, before or even after they get the bomb. So it's not a big immediate worry, except for the Israelis and the Arabs, to whom Obama sends a message that has grown less and less reassuring over the last year: Relax, I don't bluff.

The Israelis really don't want to have to attack Iranian nuclear sites. After all, isn't the Persian Gulf primarily Washington's area of interest

and influence? Israel has problems on almost all of its borders, even now with Egypt, the largest Arab state, and maybe sometime in the future with Jordan. The Americans, on the other hand, are out of Iraq and on their way out of Afghanistan and have all the equipment to do what's required. It would be better for Israel and the world if Obama did it. But his waffling over Syria increases concern that he's bluffing, however much the Israelis hope he's not.

The Iranians may also be bluffing. Should anyone touch their nuclear program, Iranian officials thunder, the resistance will unleash a wave of terror across the world. In fact, Tehran seems to have already dispatched its dogs, and their terror operations, along with Hezbollah's, have been rolled up in Europe, Africa, and Asia. Their greatest achievement of late was a suicide bombing last July at a bus station in Bulgaria that killed five Israeli tourists.

On the other side of the ledger, Israel seems to have taken out Hezbollah's Imad Mughniyah, Hamas's Mahmoud al-Mabhouh and Ahmed Jabari, Syrian general Muhammad Suleiman, and scores of Iranians associated with the nuclear weapons program. In 2007, Israel destroyed Syria's secret nuclear weapons facility at Deir al-Zawr. It has struck Iranian weapons facilities and convoys in Sudan repeatedly, most recently in October. The following month, with Operation Pillar of Defense, Israel degraded Hamas's supply of Iranian missiles in Gaza.

This then is how to understand Israel's strikes in Syria two weeks ago. Jerusalem will not allow Iran to tip the balance of power, not with medium- and long-range missiles, and almost certainly not with a nuclear bomb. The reason it has been so difficult to discern the nature of Israel's campaign to preserve the balance of power is that this tiny nation on the Mediterranean is acting like a rational state actor in defending its interests and ensuring its citizens' security. In contrast, the superpower that is supposed to set the tempo for the rest of the world is governed by a man who says he does not believe in balance of power. ♦

Self-Radicalization Chic

The preposterous theory du jour.

BY MICHAEL LEDEEN

The president has described the Boston terrorists as “self-radicalized,” and his voice is but one in a great chorus insisting that we face a major threat from Americans gone bad, almost entirely on their own, and certainly without any input from foreign countries or terrorist groups. Some of these voices can be heard in a front-page “analysis” by Scott Shane in the May 6 *New York Times*, whose title says most all of it: “A Homemade Style of Terror.”

The Boston bombers, Shane tells us, weren’t radicalized or trained in some al Qaeda camp; it happened online. They didn’t smuggle bombs into the country; the components were commonplace, and their purchase didn’t make anyone suspicious. As for ideology, Shane quotes experts dismissing its importance. One, according to the *Times*, says “the brothers might have as much in common with self-radicalized terrorists of completely different ideologies—say, white supremacism or anti-government extremism—as with the committed Qaeda operatives.” Another insists that “the key point was not that [Tamarlan Tsarnaev] had embraced radical Islam but that he planned to travel to Russia to join underground groups.”

There is a substantial cottage industry manufacturing experts on self-made terrorists, and it’s puzzling that its practitioners are rarely asked to justify the theory, since it’s logically incoherent and factually unsubstantiated. How, exactly, does a person radicalize himself? Is it, as the language suggests,

the result of communing deeply and passionately with his navel? No doubt that has happened. The first terrorist wasn’t recruited; he was truly self-radicalized, as the Unabomber was. But it’s hard to find such cases in contemporary America, where terrorists, as they proudly and aggressively tell us, are members of a group, whether it be jihadist or something else. Indeed, even if we accept the (invariably dubious) claim that the only contact with the terror network consisted of listening to incendiary language and studying bombing instructions on the Internet, the very claim undermines the self-radicalization meme. Doesn’t the Internet create communities?

The *New York Times* can’t come up with a single convincing example of self-radicalization. Four photos labeled HOMEGROWN TERRORISM appear above the text: Timothy McVeigh (Oklahoma City), Major Nidal Hasan (Fort Hood), Faisal Shahzad (Times Square), and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev. None qualifies as self-radicalized. McVeigh was recruited by the Klan and joined other nativist groups. He was recruited by Terry Nichols (now in prison for life), who frequented a college campus in the Philippines well known for Islamic radicalism. Major Hasan was inspired by Anwar al-Awlaki, the radical imam who befriended two of the 9/11 killers and other terrorists, and was subsequently killed by an American drone in Yemen, where he had lived for 11 years as a teenager and whence his parents had come to New Mexico. Shahzad was a Pakistani who lived there for almost 20 years, went back and forth numerous times, and confessed to having been trained in an al Qaeda camp

in his native land. Tsarnaev was apparently recruited by his older brother, who in turn had contacts with radical Islamists in Russia, as the Russians informed both the FBI and the CIA.

So why has self-radicalization become conventional wisdom? Its main feature is the dismissal of ideology, whether religious or political. The terrorists are all tossed in the “extremism” bag, and we don’t have to bother parsing specific doctrines to understand or combat them. This is very handy for the multiculturalists. If all cultures have equal standing, and all people are basically the same, then it’s either stupidity or bigotry to insist on listening to what they say about themselves.

The other big reason for the proliferation of the doctrine of self-radicalization is that it firmly blocks any effort to single out the followers of any given ideology, and thus rejects the very idea of a war against terrorism. Defense of the homeland becomes a quest to identify alienated loners whose ideas have nothing to do with terrorism, especially radical Islamic terrorism. As Shane’s expert says, they can latch onto most any doctrine, from white supremacism to bin Ladenism, once they’ve radicalized themselves. Who cares what they say about themselves?

But the ideas often matter a lot. The ideas, in fact, give meaning to the terrorists’ lives. Read Bernard-Henri Lévy’s biography of the man who organized the kidnapping and beheading of Daniel Pearl, for example. Omar Sheik was a well-educated Briton with Pakistani roots who came from a good family, went to good schools, and was moving steadily up the ladder. One day he went into a radical mosque, and became a convert to the ideology of jihadism. His life acquired greater meaning, and killing a Jew fulfilled him.

Omar Sheik didn’t radicalize himself, any more than McVeigh, the Tsarnaev brothers, Major Nidal, and Faisal Shahzad. They were all recruited, and all were converts. To deny that, as the president and so many self-declared experts maintain, obscures the motives of terrorists and thereby adds significantly to our peril. ♦

Michael Ledeen is the Freedom Scholar at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and author, most recently, of *Virgil’s Golden Egg and Other Neapolitan Miracles*.

Upward Mobility

A Senate job with more ups than downs.

BY RYAN LOVELACE

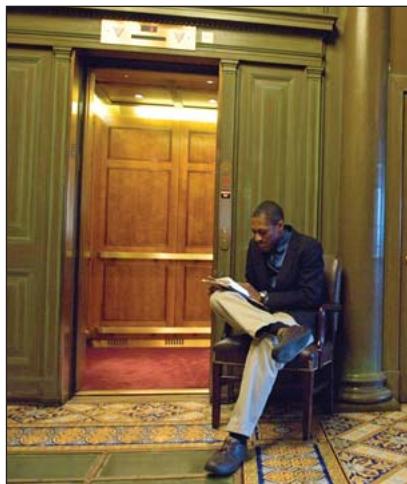
Push the correct button, win a cash prize!" That might sound like an outdated carnival game, but it actually describes government employment. Uncle Sam shelled out more than \$1.2 million to pay operators to man the Capitol's fully automated senators-only elevators over the last five years, according to reports from the secretary of the Senate.

The longer the elevator operators push the correct buttons, the more cash they win. The longest-tenured elevator operator has seen his annual salary increase each of the last five years—though non-congressional federal government employee wages are currently frozen—for total earnings of more than \$210,000.

The Senate sergeant at arms office, which employs the operators, defended the presence of elevator operators in the Capitol. The operators provide services besides the obvious, the office said via email. It listed nine roles and responsibilities of the operators separate from the physical operation of the automated elevators. Many of these functions appear focused on providing a clear and safe path for senators to move through quickly, while the rest involve pointing confused tourists in the right direction or working in the galleries during Senate recesses so that passersby can still visit. The office also notes that all elevator operators are certified in first aid and CPR.

But that argument for the necessity of elevator operators is inconsistent with the sergeant at arms office's previous verdict. When a government shutdown loomed during the spring of 2011, Senate sergeant at arms Terrance Gainer told *Roll Call* that elevator

operators would be among the furloughed nonessential staff. Even after the Senate identified the taxpayer-funded operators as nonessential, no evidence exists to suggest that the body plans to eliminate or reduce the funding for those positions.



Elevator operator Reynard Graham at work

Elevator operators have worked in the Capitol since the late 19th century. Some longtime operators said they could decipher which senator was calling based on the interval between the three rings a senator would use to summon an elevator. William Watts, an elevator operator for more than 25 years in the early 1900s, claimed to be one such expert in a *Palm Beach Daily News* report. But, Watts said, "I didn't have to tell that way when former Senator Gorman of New York wanted me. He was the most impatient man I ever knew. If I didn't come right away he would shake the door and kick it."

Such temper tantrums lingered even after the elevators became automated in the 1960s and '70s. Senator Frank Lautenberg decried the presence of unelected persons on the senators-only elevators to the *New York*

Times in 2006. "There is terrific crowding," Lautenberg complained. "Sometimes you have to shove your way through, push people."

Senator Jim Bunning famously prevented an ABC News reporter from joining him on an elevator in 2010, shouting, "Excuse me! This is a senator-only elevator!"

The unwritten rule for the senators-only elevators prohibits non-senators from entering unless a senator invites them, or they are fortunate enough to receive the patronage position of an elevator operator. The patronage system has been a hallmark of Capitol staffing for centuries. Senators may reward their political devotees with jobs in the Capitol, such as doorkeeper and elevator operator.

But it might be a dying tradition. In a 1981 interview for the U.S. Senate Oral History Project, Warren Featherstone Reid described how a friend from his hometown with political connections got him a job as an elevator operator for Senator Warren G. Magnuson in 1949 while he attended the George Washington University. "Patronage was very much the thing, and there was, I wouldn't say a lot of patronage, but comparatively there was more," Reid said, contrasting 1949 with 1981. "[E]levator operators, in a way, [had] one of the best [jobs] because you had a set shift and you didn't work overtime."

Through the years, college students hoping to finance their education often filled the positions of elevator operators. Now, elevator operators earn salaries that rival those of recent graduates. In the year ending March 31, 2012, the longest-tenured elevator operator made more than \$41,000. That salary was greater than the average starting salaries of 2011 graduates in education, math and sciences, and humanities and social sciences, according to the National Association of Colleges and Employers. This elevator operator's wage fell just a few hundred dollars short of the average starting salary of the 2011 communications graduate. Pushing the correct button hardly requires a college education, but if you know the right people, it can certainly pay off. ♦

Ryan Lovelace, a student at Butler University, is a contributing reporter to the College Fix and a WEEKLY STANDARD intern.

Radioactive Regime

Iran and its apologists

BY REUEL MARC GERECHT

The list is long of Occidentals who've fallen for Persia. This isn't surprising. Compared with Arab lands save Egypt, Iran has a longer history—Hegel described the Persians as “the first Historic people”—and a more layered modern identity. Compared with the Turks, whose indefatigable martial spirit is reified in the unadorned stone power of Istanbul's magnificent mosques, Iranians are more playful and mercurial.

Isfahan's Sheikh Loftallah Mosque, with its delicate polychrome tiles, its shifting, asymmetrical shapes radiating from the dome's apex as a peacock, captures brilliantly the Persian love of complexity, synthesis, and whimsy. Its patron, Shah Abbas the Great, a curious, wine-loving, absolute monarch, captured the imagination of contemporary Europeans, including Shakespeare.

Stubbornly attached to their Indo-European language, the people of the Iranian plateau poured their genius into poetry; also art, architecture, and an eclectic blend of faiths, which captivated their Greek, Arab, Turkish, Mongol, and British conquerors. Much like English, which resists and absorbs everything thrown at it, Persian envelops. Before reaching manhood, Ottoman princes were forbidden to learn it—the language of diplomacy and high culture among Muslims throughout much of the medieval and modern periods—since the aesthetic pull and literary range of Persian could lead innocent, Turkish-speaking Sunni boys to Shiism, the faith of the empire's most dangerous Muslim foe. It's not surprising that the prophet Muhammad was depicted



Army Day, Tehran, April 18, 2013

Reuel Marc Gerecht, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and a former Iranian targets officer in the CIA's clandestine service, is a contributing editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

in human form in medieval Persian miniatures—a “sacrilegious” act that would get an artist jailed, probably executed, in today's Islamic Republic.

Which brings us to the question: Why do so many foreign-policy types, after 34 years of seeing the revolution in action—seeing Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and his successor Ali Khamenei endlessly vent their loathing of the United States in the most sincere religious terms—stubbornly cling to the idea that the Islamic Republic and this country ought to be able to work out their differences?

Analysis and policy should be divisible. A thorough examination of Khamenei's words and actions reveals a tirelessly anti-American, terrorism-addicted Muslim paladin, chosen by divine fate and forged by personal suffering. Nonetheless, many big names in Iran policy still prefer containment of an Iranian nuke to preemption. The Brookings Institution's Ken Pollack in his soon-to-be published book *Unthinkable: Iran, the Bomb, and American Strategy* advances a powerful, if ultimately unsatisfying, argument in favor of containment while limning a damning picture of the Islamic Republic. This is rare. Usually, arguments for engagement or containment follow more-fiction-than-fact portraits of the mullahs in power. Are Iran's many Western apologists analytically challenged, deceitful, or just scared so stiff of another war in the Middle East that they secularize and sanitize the clerical regime?

Washington is now in a self-imposed lull on the Iranian nuclear question, awaiting the Islamic Republic's presidential election on June 14. We know that this election is meaningless for the atomic program, that Khamenei—not Iran's president, who will probably be personally approved by the supreme leader before the election—has controlled the nuclear dossier from the beginning. Hassan Rowhani, the former nuclear negotiator, a “moderate,” who openly bragged that Tehran had successfully prolonged negotiations to advance its atomic designs, was clear in his

memoirs about who runs the show: Khamenei. The White House understandably wants to avoid the day when the International Atomic Energy Agency issues so damning a report on the Islamic Republic's advance that the president and his senior advisers are forced to decide whether America preemptively strikes or acquiesces to a bomb in Khamenei's hands.

A plethora of sanctions are scheduled to take effect on July 1, any or all of which can be waived by the president. The administration is currently trying to stall new sanctions legislation in the Senate. Secretary of State John Kerry wants, congressional sources say, more diplomatic running room, though this go-slow approach, tried before by the Europeans and the Americans, has stopped neither spinning centrifuges nor progress at the plutonium-producing heavy-water plant at Arak.

SO MANY CENTRIFUGES

The West and the Islamic Republic may finally be nearing the denouement of their nuclear standoff.

As Tehran gradually replaces its first-generation centrifuges with more efficient models and improves the performance of all its machines, an undetectable "breakout capacity"—the time needed to enrich enough uranium for a bomb to weapons grade—is coming. Probably by mid-2014 the regime will have the ability to convert its 20 percent-enriched uranium to weapons grade too rapidly for the United States to stop it militarily. The Arak facility, meanwhile, which will produce separated plutonium, appears ready to go online by mid-2014. As David Albright, the nonproliferation expert at the Institute for Science and International Security, has tirelessly pointed out, a breakout capacity of three weeks would be almost impossible for Western intelligence, and even the IAEA with its weekly and spot inspections of the Iranian facilities, to detect. And supposing a breakout *were* detected, it is difficult to imagine Washington's unwieldy foreign-policy process and cautious president gearing up a preemptive strike within 21 days.

By 2015 the breakout period could well be one week. Olli Heinonen, the former number two at the IAEA and now at Harvard's Belfer Center, worries that the regime may already have secret storage facilities for enriched uranium. IAEA inspectors privately confess that they don't know where Iran is building its centrifuges (though they have educated guesses). It's likely that neither the CIA nor the French foreign-intelligence service, the DGSE, which has been tracking Iran's nuclear program fairly seriously for decades, has a better idea than the IAEA inspectors. According to a plugged-in French official, France has

tried to put centrifuge production on the table at meetings with Tehran. Perhaps still hoping for a serious Iranian offer of bilateral talks with the United States and a deal on 20 percent enrichment, President Obama's team has so far blocked Paris. But unless the production of centrifuges is somehow slowed and the Arak plutonium plant shuttered, the United States (and Israel) will soon have to choose to preempt or acquiesce.

As we draw nearer to judgment day, those who have assiduously portrayed Iran as nonthreatening—or sufficiently hazard-free to dismiss military action—will surely try to take the foreground. Barack Obama has said unequivocally that he will not allow the Islamic Republic to develop an atomic weapon. He has alluded to the growing menace of a clandestine nuclear dash. "We have a sense," the president said during the 2012 campaign, "of when they would get breakout capacity, which means that we would not be able to intervene in time to stop their nuclear program, and that clock is ticking." Democratic doves, Republican isolationists, and bipartisan "realists" may grow increasingly anxious that Obama, who prides himself on his toughness with drones and his long-standing concern about nuclear proliferation, just might mean what he says. It certainly appears that the president's visit to Israel in March convinced Benjamin Netanyahu that Obama was sufficiently serious to quiet the prime minister's anxiety about Washington's intentions. (The extraordinary military and political challenges of an Israeli preemptive strike against the Islamic Republic may also have helped.)

But virtually no one in Washington takes the president's threat at face value. Does anyone in Tehran? Given Obama's manifest desire to extricate the United States from Middle Eastern adventures, his caution in Syria, his choice of dovish senior officials, his defense cuts, his parsimony in expressing his willingness to use force abroad, the queasiness of liberals about the legality of preemptive action, and the boldness of the Quds Force, the terrorist unit within the Revolutionary Guard Corps, in planning a bombing run against the Saudi ambassador in Washington in 2011 (the punishment for which was . . . more sanctions), Khamenei is no more concerned about this issue than the American left.

But the supreme leader has shown repeatedly that he has no intention of allowing this American president to punt the problem with honor. The recently concluded nuclear discussions in Almaty, like all previous sessions, failed. And this time round, the Iranians really should have "compromised" if the regime were worried about an American strike. The Americans and Europeans came very close to recognizing an Iranian "right" to enrich uranium to 5 percent. According to both American and European officials, negotiations focused exclusively on 20 percent

enrichment, leaving low-enriched uranium off the table. As the Council on Foreign Relations's Ray Takeyh has commented, American recognition of Tehran's "right" to enrich uranium to 5 percent would have insulated all of Iran's enrichment facilities against either American or Israeli preemptive raids. The regime would then have been free to install new centrifuges and swap out old ones and serenely shrink the calendar for an undetectable breakout. Granting Tehran this "right," which does not exist in the Non-Proliferation Treaty, to which Iran is a signatory, and which violates U.N. Security Council resolution 1696, would also have collapsed international sanctions against dual-use imports—and perhaps fatally weakened the EU sanctions regime, which is already under stress from court challenges. Tehran could have openly purchased all the centrifuge parts it desired, setting an example for other nuke-hungry states.

The Obama administration may not have even realized all of the aftershocks that would follow from an Iranian "right" to enrich to 5 percent. The White House offered Tehran an oil-for-gold deal allowing the Islamic Republic to sell crude in exchange for bullion. According to American and European officials, this arrangement could have been sufficiently lucrative that Washington effectively was offering Tehran a hard-currency lifeline. Whatever coercive utility American and European sanctions have had on the nuclear question would have ceased, since hard-currency reserves keep Iran's currency from cratering. What's more, Iran's ability to pocket Western concessions is probably greater than the West's ability to rescind them. Foreign gold traders, once fearful of Washington, are again trading more with Tehran. If the Iranian regime had been less ideological (read "religious") and more pragmatic, it could have aggressively used the gold loophole to gut the most crippling financial sanctions and possibly fracture the transatlantic alliance against it.

It's unimaginable now that Washington could offer more than it did in Almaty. There simply are limits to how forthcoming the White House can be in its willingness to let the Iranian regime go nuclear; past presidential rhetoric cannot be wished away. Nor can North Korean nuclear nuttiness, which underscores the scariness of third-world

rogue states' having atomic weapons. Pyongyang has been essential to the development of Iran's ballistic missiles and probably critical to its nuclear quest. The North Koreans helped build an undeclared, weapons-capable, nuclear fuel plant in Syria, which the Israelis destroyed in 2007; it's likely that Iran backed, if not initiated, the North Korean-Syrian deal, as a means to further its own nuclearization. Ironically, North Korean behavior has now made the Islamic Republic's pursuit of the bomb more problematic.

Khamenei's and Kim Jong-un's resolute defiance of the West has put Obama into a pickle that could, conceivably, oblige the president to strike. It will become increasingly difficult to ignore the enormous centrifuge buildup and the progress at Arak. Although the president likes to highlight an Iranian decision to weaponize as the immovable red line, knowledgeable senior administration officials say privately that American intelligence can only reliably monitor—thanks to the IAEA inspection system—uranium enrichment and plutonium processing. Human sources and intercepts, Washington's only means of monitoring Iranian "intentions," have been depressingly inadequate. The CIA, need we recall, missed the nuclear weaponization of every nonaligned state—the USSR, Communist China, South Africa, India, Pakistan, and North Korea—and probably didn't guess well with Israel. On Iran, the National Intelligence Estimates, especially the much-disputed 2007 assessment which claimed that nuclear weaponization had stopped after the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003, show, in their sliding scale of equivocation and assertion, the gaping holes in Washington's information on the Islamic Republic's nuclear establishment. Any active-duty or former senior official who suggests that American intelligence can successfully monitor Iranian intentions—for example, the director of national intelligence, James Clapper, or former ambassador Thomas Pickering, who has made Iran engagement a personal hobby—is fibbing, to himself and to others.

As the Israelis and the French have always contended, enrichment and plutonium processing are the de facto benchmarks for weaponization. If the Israelis have any intention of striking the Islamic Republic's nuclear sites,



President Ahmadinejad tours the Natanz facility, 2007

they will have to do so before the increasing number of advanced centrifuges makes such an action ineffectual and too dangerous. It is probably already too late for a raid—certainly in Europe and Washington there is palpably less fear of Israeli preemption since the Islamic Republic's progress on centrifuges and the limitations of Israeli airpower have become more apparent. If Jerusalem is still serious about striking and the White House knows the Israeli cabinet has decided to take the risk, it's possible the president will actually prefer to see Jerusalem preempt, knowing that an angry Iranian response could oblige Washington to defend its interests in the region. An American raid on Iran first could be too difficult for Obama to swallow; finishing off the Islamic Republic's nuclear program after the Israelis had struck would be politically and spiritually much easier. In any case, as fear of an Israeli strike diminishes—and, as a result, European and American unity against Tehran frays—the American discussion of pre-emption will grow more serious.

The savvy parts of the antiwar American left can see the writing on the wall. The Ploughshares Fund, a leading funder of nonproliferation projects, is already shifting its focus to containment. And for the left, "containment" means a nonaggressive policy toward the Islamic Republic (the bloody reality of Cold War containment being long forgotten). Obama's legendary caution and deep discomfort with the use of American power abroad may not be enough to overcome the logic and responsibility of the presidency, where risks to national security are difficult to downplay. Obama's pledge to stop an Iranian nuke may have initially been bluff. But presidential bellicosity, as George W. Bush learned, has more to do with supervening events than with a president's preexisting proclivities. If the president doesn't punt on Syria, where Bashar al-Assad appears to have crossed the White House's red line on using poison gas, then the odds that Obama isn't bluffing about an Iranian nuke go up. (The reverse is also true.) And even if the president doesn't manfully follow through in the Levant, Iran still may be a special case. The strategic magnitude of Khamenei's having a nuke is so great that even "caution" in Syria might not imply American timidity with the Islamic Republic.

So the struggle among those who want to acquiesce to an Iranian bomb and withdraw from the Middle East, those who want to acquiesce but try to contain Tehran, and those who want to preempt will soon begin in earnest. Although Khamenei and his Revolutionary Guards may

make it difficult to minimize the menace of a nuclear-armed Islamic Republic, we can expect to see many attempts to downplay the clerical regime's fusion of faith and ideology. As with Iraq in 1990 and 2003, the closer we come to war, the more energetic will be the efforts to blur in shades of gray the history and nature of the foe. The rich complexity and contradictions of Iranian society will aid those who just want to let Khamenei and his guards have their weapon.

THE APOLOGISTS

Those who will excuse the regime are not all intellectually flippant—Flynt and Hillary Leverett and Trita Parsi come to mind. Nor are they Iranian-Americans like the writer and Charlie Rose-favorite Hooman Majd and the Rutgers academic-turned-Iranian presidential candidate Hooshang Amirahmadi who play and proselytize among the two countries' progressive elites, always trying to keep the door open to the beloved Old World. Nor are they in general folks who are profoundly uncomfortable with American power. They aren't, for the most part, those who reflexively give the moral high ground to third-worlders jousting with the West. Many of this hopeful set are accomplished, even hard-nosed, diplomats, soldiers, scholars, journalists, and pundits who appear to believe that a bargain is still possible between the United States and the Islamic Republic.

The Iranian regime's love affair with violence—no state, with the possible exception of Syria under the Assads, has so actively promoted terrorism—usually makes small ripples in these folks' assessments. The theocracy's penchant for what the military historian David Crist calls "covert war" is regularly depicted by the hopeful as the defensive reaction of an insecure regime, as if the supreme leader and his Revolutionary Guards were in need of psychiatric help. But Tehran embraces terrorism. Not even the former Soviet Union, with its affection for hard-left revolutionary groups and the Palestine Liberation Organization, aided anti-Western terrorist organizations as energetically as the Islamic Republic. This the apologists see as realpolitik. Even Tehran's flirtation with the Sunni killer elite—the Egyptian Islamic Jihad organization of Ayman al-Zawahiri and al Qaeda (see the 9/11 Commission Report and more

The Iranian regime's love affair with violence—no state with the possible exception of Syria under the Assads has so actively promoted terrorism—usually makes small ripples in the assessments of its apologists.

recent Treasury designations)—is seldom brought up. Tehran's fondness for creating Hezbollahs ("Parties of God") wherever it has the reach and can find the local talent usually gets misconstrued as bad-boy Shiite solidarity around local grievances rather than a manifestation of Iran's trans-national revolutionary ideology. The regime's exuberant embrace of anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial (that is, Holocaust approval) gets downplayed as an annoying subset of the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation.

Khamenei's crackdown on the pro-democracy Green Movement in the summer of 2009 led to thousands jailed and tortured and, according to credible Iranian sources, around 150 killed; it also turned the ruling elite against itself. Yet even this only dented the diplomacy-is-possible mindset, which sees Iran's internal affairs as largely extraneous to whether the United States and the Islamic Republic can achieve anything like normal relations. The supreme leader damned the millions who hit the streets as agents of America. They weren't: Even under Ronald Reagan, who used covert action more than his successors, America never had a regime-change policy for the mullahs or even soft-power, pro-democracy operations that went beyond nostalgia-tweaking, in-country TV broadcasts and the publishing of Persian editions of liberal books.

Khamenei, obsessed since youth with the insidious, sensual attraction of the West, sincerely believes the gravamen he hurled at the Green Movement. Yet three-and-a-half years later, we still find serious people writing op-eds, policy papers, and books reflecting on "mutual mistrust," "mutual demonization," "years of suspicion," and the "American missteps" that have kept the clerical regime and U.S. presidents from realizing the "obvious" geostrategic interests their countries share.

These apologists don't persevere for the money, often the reason adults in the West, especially in Washington, say exculpatory things about foreign tyrannies—even if Tehran does bankroll a few think-tankers and university scholars through private "cut-out" philanthropy (the Alavi Foundation in New York, pursued by federal prosecutors in 2009, is a case in point). And the Islamic Republic certainly isn't Saudi Arabia. There's not a soul in Washington or New York or London who would defend the sybaritic Saudi royals and their head-and-hand-chopping Wahhabi clergy were it not for cash. Without oil, Saudis would have the same appeal as the Afghan Taliban.

In the past, before the Islamic Republic's less radical set around former president Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005) got stuffed, American corporate money could



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encourage a sympathetic disposition towards Tehran. A prestigious American think tank could organize a major study that supported expanding U.S.-Iranian commerce, and innocently have a principal organizer and drafter of the study make calls from her Exxon office. Former ambassador Pickering, a senior vice president at Boeing from 2001 to 2006, has urged the United States to keep trying to normalize relations with the Islamic Republic. Pickering, however, rarely acknowledges his Boeing link in op-eds and articles, even though the company was, until recently, a big fan of lifting sanctions so as to sell airplanes and parts to an eager Persian clientele. Take away Boeing, and Ambassador Pickering would surely have had the same views toward the Islamic Republic. But the unacknowledged overlap is disconcerting.

THE CULTURAL APOLOGISTS

Part of the reason so many Americans and Europeans have been charitably disposed towards the Iranian regime is cultural spillover. The magnificence of the Persian past and the warmth of the Iranian people still attract. Western journalists and scholars who have been given permission to travel in Iran (the list keeps shrinking) are particularly susceptible. The *International Herald Tribune* and *New York Times* columnist Roger Cohen, who visited the Islamic Republic before the crackdown in the summer of 2009 and wrote pieces extolling the tolerant, hospitable side of the Iranian character, is an eloquent example of this cultural critique among aesthetically sensitive Westerners. Cohen extended his analysis even to Persian Jews, who've emigrated and fled in large numbers since the revolution and whose leadership can get hit hard when the regime feels angry (with charges of espionage, for example, or sodomy, a capital offense). Time in Iran led Cohen to write, "The reality of Iranian civility toward the Jews tells us more about Iran—its sophistication and culture—than all the inflammatory rhetoric. This may be because I'm a Jew and have seldom been treated with such consistent warmth as in Iran."

Cohen had a point, which he did not make: Shiite Iranians have been tortured and killed far more frequently than Jewish Iranians since Shiites are expected to embrace fully the Islamic Republic's *mission civilisatrice* at home and abroad; religious minorities are not. Jews in Iran, if they keep silent about Israel and show public fidelity to the Islamic order, are "museum pieces," a part of Persian history that revolutionary mullahs tolerate but rarely esteem.

Cohen's commendable appreciation of Persian culture and history led him to the British Museum to see Cyrus the Great's Cylinder, the cuneiform-on-baked-clay legal guide

and panegyric, with its timeless message of "tolerance." The cylinder is coming soon to the Smithsonian, an event, Cohen noted, that "occurs with the United States and Iran still locked in the negative stereotypes the movie *Argo* has done nothing to assuage. . . . But compact and mute, . . . [the cylinder] is a powerful antidote to the belligerent certitudes and shrieking 'truths'—an object packed with ambiguity and now freighted with a 2,500-year-old tale of human vanity and frailty." One would think that Cyrus's legendary magnanimity, which led to the Jews' return to Israel from their Babylonian captivity and the reconstruction of the Temple, would be more usefully displayed in Tehran than in Washington.

A variation of this cultural critique of politics is offered by John Limbert, the former hostage, who is probably the most erudite Persian-speaker ever to pass through Foggy Bottom. Limbert had retired from the State Department to teach at the Naval Academy, but returned to Washington in the service of one he saw as a possible breakthrough president, promising to reset relations with the Muslim world. It was likely Limbert who drafted the Persian-language letters from President Obama to Khamenei in 2009. Soft-spoken, considerate, with a deep and wry grasp of Persian literature, Harvard-educated, and married to an Iranian, Limbert was widely welcomed among the cognoscenti in Washington, who shared his hopes. After the pro-democracy Green Movement erupted and was suppressed, catching the White House off guard, Limbert went back to teaching. "The Obama administration has been in office now for over a year and a half, and I think everyone thought we would be in a better place with Iran," he forlornly remarked. "Not necessarily that we would be friends, but that we would at least be talking to each other on a regular and civil basis."

Limbert has written and spoken trenchantly about the Islamic Republic's failures. But his sympathy for the Iranian people and his displeasure at seeing Washington, even under Obama, incapable of the nuanced approach he believes required for such a complicated country reinforces a mindset Limbert has probably had ever since the hostage-takers blindfolded him and the other Americans at the Tehran embassy in 1979: two countries misunderstood, errant, unnecessarily demonizing each other, locked in a Manichean struggle. But for Limbert, as for many cultural apologists, the greater burden rests with America, the superpower, which helped engineer a regrettable coup d'état in Iran in 1953 and later did little to curb the shah's tyranny.

Other culture-first observers of Iran try to translate personal experience into larger political points. The English journalist Christopher de Bellaigue, whose finely etched portraits of Iranian life often appear in the *New*

York Review of Books, is perhaps the best of these. He conveys the mirth, passions, cynicism, and religious and economic fatigue of contemporary life in an Iran transformed by the revolution. His writings are a counterpoint to those of expatriate Iranians and Westerners who see counter-revolution just around the corner. In Bellaigue's telling, Persians may live in a theocratic state that is capable of brutality, but its harshness is softened by a still-powerful traditional culture and an open love of modernity. Bellaigue sees an Islamic Republic where the regime has some legitimacy among the faithful (he's undoubtedly right), but is weakened by pervasive cynicism.

The Shiite love of *taqiyya*, the deception that believers may legitimately use against nonbelievers or, as was most often the case, more powerful Sunnis, now plays against the mullahs and their security services. The regime constantly lies, especially about corruption among the revolutionary elite; the Iranian people lie right back. Bellaigue, also married to an Iranian, always sees the kaleidoscope of color—the humanity—that exists even within the regime. He unfailingly empathizes, fulfilling the imperative that any foreigner see the natives as they see themselves.

Seven years ago, when the Western commentariat feared that George W. Bush might unleash another war, Bellaigue frightfully envisioned an American attack during a languid Iranian summer. "In my heart, I am more like the people about me. 'Crisis? What Crisis?' As the air warms and my wife lumbers into her final smiling month of pregnancy, it seems too vile to imagine that sometime soon, a nice American boy may press a button or open a chamber and rain destruction down around us."

The contradictions of the Islamic Republic can have a profound effect on Westerners looking in. The closer you get, the more disorienting they become. In America, as in Western Europe, there is no great disconnect between culture and politics: The morality of the average American is roughly in tune with the mores of his elected representatives. Even in France, where the political elite, refined by Parisian tastes and generations of meritocratic education, is the most distant from the governed, there is still a shared moral compass that defines and limits the actions of the political class. In Iran, as in most authoritarian societies, the goodness of the people seems outlandishly at odds with the distant wickedness of the ruling thugs. Limbert's admirable little book on the Islamic Republic, written in 1987, captures this disconnect in its title, *Iran: At War with History*. The constant incongruities—the

unrelentingly wry, cynical, playful genius of Iranians versus the harsh Islam of the Khomeinists—is compounded by the long-standing democratic aspirations of so many Persians, which have been advanced by even culturally conservative clerics. One doesn't have to accept the Iran-centric cultural critique of the Stanford scholar Abbas Milani (Iranians had the cultural building blocks for an open democratic society before most Europeans did) to nonetheless embrace Milani's enthusiasm for *la différence persane*. Iranians aren't Arabs, Uzbeks, Turkomans, or Pakistanis: There is something in Persian culture, something old but effervescent, prideful and curious, that makes the observer immediately conscious of unfulfilled, enormous potential, of unrequited but not unreasonable dreams.

Attentive Western observers cannot fail to notice the powerful oblique criticism of the regime in contemporary Persian literature and film. Though tolerance for these scathing critiques has ebbed and flowed since Khomeini's death in 1989, the general effect of such colorful dissent is to underscore how different Iran's religious dictatorship is from lifeless

Communist tyrannies, Saddam's Iraq, or even the more humdrum secular authoritarianism that the Great Arab Revolt has challenged since 2010. Truly wicked regimes—the type that really shouldn't have nuclear weapons—wouldn't allow such dissent, the Western commentariat suggests. Occidentals need consistency, and Iranians don't supply it. If the hypocrisies of Persian society are so omnipresent and impressive—especially at the top of society (clerics indulging in sexual escapades, the sons and daughters of the rich and powerful at play in London, Paris, and Rome)—then nothing in Iran can really be that holy. The regime, nasty as it may be, just isn't sufficiently hard-core and competent to terrify the West, even if the regime gets a nuclear weapon.

Since the end of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88), which finally stopped young Iranian men from martyring themselves, Westerners have not been powerfully exposed to the passion-play side of the Iranian character that latched onto Shiism, the martyr's faith par excellence. The Iran-Semitic taste for myth can make the Persian faithful highly susceptible to idealistic visions and hidden truths. Marry that to Persian hubris and to a nasty modern embitterment that is religious, ethnic, and profoundly Marxist, and one can see why Iran had an Islamic revolution and the pitiless,

obsidian-eyed Ruhollah Khomeini became the *Imam*, a charismatic leader touched by God.

The dark side has always been politically preeminent in the Islamic Republic, even after the war against Saddam Hussein had largely burned jihadism out of the common faithful. Even in the early 1990s, when Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the “pragmatic” major-domo of the politicized clergy, was opening Iran to European investment and trying to find ways to attract American capital and technology, Rafsanjani and Khamenei, working amicably in tandem, were blowing up Jews in Argentina and Americans at Khobar Towers and murdering Iranian dissidents across Europe. In 1997, when the always-smiling Mohammad Khatami won nearly 70 percent of the popular vote for president, most Western academics and journalists who covered Iran saw Thermidor coming. They believed their Iranian interlocutors, highly Westernized reformers, proud but dispirited revolutionaries all, who were hopeful that the Islamic Republic would have a soft evolution to popular sovereignty. They badly misjudged Khamenei, who loathed Khatami’s “dialogue among civilizations”; they didn’t know at all the Revolutionary Guards who’d risen to manhood in the war and remained, even after the slaughter, committed to Khomeini’s dreams. The fraternity of combat and their own miraculous survival made these warriors an elite, with a hardened sense of divine destiny and entitlement.

Today, visiting journalists and academics, like Western nuclear negotiators, rarely spend time with the overseers of Evin Prison, who can beat, rape, and torture. Nor do they hang out with the dissident-beating Basij or chat with active-duty intelligence officers who have learned how to crack Iranian families apart through just the intimation of violence. They seldom converse with the hardcore clergy, who still recognize Khamenei’s right to rule, or with the mullahs-in-the-making at the Revolutionary Guard Corps’s new clerical school in Qom. Resident or visiting Westerners have little to no firsthand knowledge of senior guardsmen, especially the Quds Force, responsible for recent lethal strikes on Israeli diplomats and tourists and the targeted killings of American soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Quds Force has assumed liaison responsibility from Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence for foreign radical Islamic groups and terrorist organizations. This assumption of authority mirrors the enormous growth in power of Khamenei’s personal office, which now employs upwards of 5,000 people, and his strong preference for the Revolutionary Guards over other state institutions. The nuclear program is under the corps’s supervision. It is not unreasonable to guess that Khamenei would give the Quds Force, his most trusted praetorians, control of the Islamic Republic’s atomic weapons.

Cultural apologists, who tend to be thoroughly secular, don’t highlight the unbeliever-vs.-God dimension to the Islamic Republic’s internal and external struggles. Modern radical Islamic militancy comes in many shades, but it is often fairly forgiving of believers’ personal faults so long as they have the big vision correct. This derives from traditional Islam, where heresy is an awkward, undigested concept in large part because Islamic theology is so thin (the Holy Law, at least in theory, is what counts) and the “confession of faith,” the *shahada*, the essential and sufficient acts for a Muslim, are so few. Sunni and Shiite fundamentalists certainly want the believer to follow a code of conduct (no booze, no pork, prayer, sex only with one’s wives or husband), but the real issue for Islamists is the struggle between the West (at home and abroad) and the faith. It is overtly political, yet also, in their minds, explicitly religious.

The omnipresent hypocrisies of the revolutionary elite don’t really touch their faith since religion in the Islamic Republic has become “secularized.” There is the political creed, which is primary, and then there is personal faith, which is between you and the Almighty. The same secularizing process is now happening to the empowered Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Westerners, with their Christian roots, have an extraordinarily hard time digesting the obviously irreligious political maneuvering and corruption of sincere, deadly serious Islamists. Westerners see contradictions and smell pragmatism; radical Muslims see right through the contradictions to the categorical imperative: hatred of the United States, Jews, and Israel (the order may vary, but all three are always there). Whether Rafsanjani’s, Khamenei’s, and senior guard commanders’ children are partying hard in London tells you little about their parents’ conception of Islam or tolerance for Western culture (and little about the children’s commitment to the revolutionary creed). It tells you nothing about why the revolutionary elite has so consistently used terrorism as both statecraft and soulcraft. VIP hypocrisies are a digression from the fundamental observation made by the *Wall Street Journal*’s Bret Stephens: Mullahs who can’t make up their minds whether it’s lawful to bash a woman’s head in for having sex outside wedlock ought not to have access to a nuclear weapon.

THE DIPLOMATIC APOLOGISTS

The analytical missteps of the cultural apologists set the stage for policy types in Washington who just want to let Tehran have the bomb but are unwilling to say so. Many of the VIP signers of the reports of the Iran Project, which have been hailed and partly paid for by the Ploughshares Fund, would come under

this rubric. The Washington foreign-policy establishment always has a zeitgeist, and on the Iranian nuclear question the considered, socially acceptable position is that diplomacy and sanctions still have time to work—but, as the president has it, “all options are still on the table.”

Most foreign-policy cognoscenti have already acquiesced to the idea, if not yet the reality, of nuclear weapons in the hands of Khamenei and his praetorians, but they don’t want to gainsay the president publicly—or let go of the diplomatic option for fear that the president might be obliged to launch a preemptive strike.

Though dimmed in our memories, 9/11 still has a kick. It’s difficult for former senior officials (less so academics) to say openly that it would be better to let terrorists have an atomic bomb than risk war between the United States and the Islamic Republic. So they prevaricate and try to lessen the mullahs’ menace. And some, like former ambassadors Pickering, Frank Wisner, Daniel Kurtzer, and William Luers and the MIT professor Jim Walsh, who have all striven to advance mini-“grand bargains” and nuclear compromises, may well believe what they write about Iran. At a recent McCain Institute debate on the Islamic Republic, Pickering averred that Washington and Tehran are now closer to a diplomatic resolution of the nuclear imbroglio than they have been in years. This would be news to the French, who have the finest diplomatic service in the West and have been doggedly negotiating with Tehran over its nuclear program since 2003 and engaging the regime, at times with great enthusiasm, since 1992.

At the McCain Institute debate, Pickering complimented the president for keeping open the possibility of preemption since it enhances American diplomacy. Yet in late 2012 he called “all options on the table” a “gold-standard trope” of Republican jingoists, and in 2008 in the *New York Review of Books* he called it “unrealistic” and “dangerous.” The unacknowledged logic is: If preemption is off the table, then any diplomatic track is acceptable since there is ultimately no irreconcilable point of contention. If one could somehow talk the Iranian regime into building only 500 IR-2 centrifuges in six months instead of 1,000, then Western diplomats could claim they’d succeeded. With this crowd, diplomacy is really not about prevention. So why not recognize the regime’s “legitimate” right to 5 percent-enriched uranium? With Persian pride thus satisfied, so the hope goes, the Iranians might voluntarily slow their program. Once Washington has sensitively dealt with Iran’s “enduring sense of insecurity” and shown a willingness to rise above 34 years of “mutual ignorance” and “overpowering distrust” and bridge “the vast cavern of psychological space” between it and the mullahs and

their guards, then self-interest should lead the Iranian regime, in today’s “increasingly geo-commercial era,” to seek a more prosperous normalcy with America.

It’s probably the most amusing irony to be found within the American foreign-policy establishment: The more merry realists and soft-hearted liberals advocate a friendlier American approach to the Islamic Republic, the more they amplify, if that’s possible, the supreme leader’s hatred of the United States. Anything that brings America closer, that threatens to bring normalcy to U.S.-Iranian relations, is anathema to him. A grand bargain for Khamenei is death. Mini-grand bargains are slow-motion suicide. Barack Obama was the test case. American and European Iran apologists could not have asked for a more promising president to test their theories. In 2009 Obama actually believed that mutual ignorance and, at least on the Iranian side, justified distrust had defined bilateral relations before his coming. He extended his hand. He dreamed of direct, unconditional U.S.-Iranian talks. He kept quiet when the Green Revolution erupted on Tehran’s streets. Obama was certainly prepared in 2009—if Khamenei had only given him an encouraging sign—to waive the then largely ineffective U.S. sanctions against the Islamic Republic. There was no “missed opportunity” with this president. How did Khamenei respond to Obama’s entreaties? He called America *shaytan-e mojassem* (“Satan incarnate”).

The increasing number of Iranian centrifuges and extent of plutonium processing at Arak will surely bring much-needed clarity and honesty to Washington’s great Iran debate. The choices before us are preemption, aggressive containment, and retreat. And effective containment, which would strike back militarily against Iranian-directed or -inspired terrorism, could lead to war—with a nuclear-armed Islamic Republic. So we will soon see whether the indomitable late French intellectual and official Thérèse Delpech, who’d closely watched France’s and Europe’s dealings with Islamic Republic, was right. An admirer of the United States, she was nevertheless skeptical that almighty Washington would do any better than the less mighty Europeans had with the Islamic Republic. In her 2007 book *Le Grand Perturbateur (The Great Agitator)*, she reflects on the nature of the clerical regime and the ups and mostly downs of European-Iranian relations. Looking at a bleak future, Delpech wryly closes with this insight: *L’expérience est une école où les leçons coûtent cher, mais c’est la seule où même les imbéciles peuvent apprendre quelque chose.* (“Life is a school where the lessons cost dearly, but it’s the only place where even imbeciles can learn something.”)

Even after 9/11, it’s possible that Delpech will prove to have been too optimistic. ♦



The late Anwar al-Awlaki delivers 'A Message to the People of the Media' (2011).

Unfriendly Fire

Terrorism has its partisans, alas. BY BRUCE BAWER

He poses as an investigative journalist and is presented in his main outlets—the *Nation*, MSNBC, *Socialist Worker*, *Democracy Now!*—as a foreign-affairs expert. In fact, Jeremy Scahill—a college dropout who was arrested several times in the 1990s in connection with (among other things) the occupation of a federal building and the vandalizing of a military aircraft—has never been anything but a radical

Bruce Bawer is the author, most recently, of *The Victims' Revolution: The Rise of Identity Studies and the Closing of the Liberal Mind*.

Dirty Wars
The World Is a Battlefield
 by Jeremy Scahill
 Nation Books, 680 pp., \$29.99

ideologue out to discredit America and debilitate its defenses.

In 1996, as a 21-year-old member of a “faith-based resistance community,” a disciple of the anarchist Philip Berrigan, and a fan of Fidel Castro, Scahill told the *Washington Post* that American sanctions were “torturing people of the world by starving them to death.” Later, after working on Michael

Moore’s TV show *The Awful Truth*, he coproduced a documentary charging Chevron with human-rights abuses in Nigeria (the courts didn’t agree) and, in a memorable 2010 appearance on MSNBC, argued fervently with Ed Koch about the Gaza flotilla.

What really made Scahill’s name, however, was his one-man crusade against Blackwater (now Academi). It’s no exaggeration to describe him as the seminal source of virtually every slur about that company (and its founder, Erik Prince) that has made the media rounds in the last decade. His 2007 book *Blackwater: The Rise of the World’s Most Powerful Mercenary Army* is awash

in false claims (for example, that the United States employed “tens of thousands of mercenaries” in Iraq, and that the State Department may have vetoed Blackwater protection for Benazir Bhutto, thus causing her death) that aren’t even supported by the sources he cites. His hyped-up rhetoric, meanwhile, is patently designed to make everything about Blackwater sound sinister. (While he calls the firm’s operatives “mercenaries,” and compares them to “Nazi Party brownshirts,” he labels groups like Shining Path and the Sandinistas “popular movements.”)

The more one reads Jeremy Scahill, the plainer it is that he’s offended by the very idea of the American military—indeed, by the very idea of the United States. Which brings us to *Dirty Wars: The World Is a Battlefield*. Blackwater makes a cameo here, but this time Scahill’s topic (not only in the book, but in a documentary of the same name that recently premiered at—where else?—the Sundance Festival) is considerably broader. After 9/11, he argues, George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, and Donald Rumsfeld introduced a new mindset, to wit:

The world is a battlefield and we are at war. Therefore the military can go wherever they please and do whatever it is that they want to do, in order to achieve the national security objectives of whichever administration happens to be in power.

The result: secret armies, covert operations, and unauthorized killings, all of which, Scahill claims, only led more and more Muslims to become radicalized.

To read this book, you would never know that it wasn’t America but its enemies who, acting on Koranic dictates about jihad and the “House of War,” made the world a battlefield. Consistently, Scahill prettifies Islamic ideology and jurisprudence (quoting with a straight face the claim that Somalia’s Islamic Courts Union consisted of “liberals, moderates and extremists” who shared only a determination to “stabiliz[e] the country through Sharia law”). In Scahill’s

lexicon, the terrorist group Al Shabab operates “popular social programs,” while the United States forms “dark side forces” and wages “twilight wars.” If Abu Ghraib, under Saddam Hussein, was merely a “prison and torture chamber,” it became a “gulag” under the United States.

Scahill shifts back and forth between telling the big story of America’s post-9/11 perfidy and providing an up-close-and-personal account of a representative victim of the American killing machine, namely Anwar al-Awlaki—the high-profile Yemeni-American imam who, he repeatedly tells us, was “an American sentenced to death with no trial.” Awlaki returned to Yemen after 9/11, wrote for the magazine *Inspire* (published by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula), and, in one fiery sermon after another, urged Muslims to slaughter Americans. He is known to have been involved in the 2009 plan by underwear bomber Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab to down an airliner over Detroit, but Scahill describes his role in that plot as “unclear,” and seeks to leave the impression that Awlaki’s sole offense was preaching his religion.

Scahill makes a special effort to stir our sympathies for Awlaki’s father, who, knowing the United States had his son in its crosshairs, took to American courts to argue that if the Great Satan killed Awlaki in Yemen, it would violate his constitutional rights. (Nowhere does Scahill recognize the absurdity of America’s enemies trying to use the U.S. justice system to cripple America’s attempt to defeat them.) Similarly, Scahill depicts Major Nidal Hasan—who frequently contacted Awlaki for theological counsel before murdering 13 people at Fort Hood in 2009—not as a jihadist whom authorities failed to finger in time because they feared being called Islamophobes, but as a man of conscience who was driven to retributive violence by American Islamophobia.

For Scahill, whose *spécialité de la maison* is attacking Democrats from the left, Barack Obama has been even worse than George W. Bush because,

betraying his campaign promises, he “embraced the neoconservative vision of the world as the battlefield,” escalated “the covert U.S. war against al Qaeda,” and was determined to take out Osama bin Laden and, later, Awlaki. (Scahill approvingly quotes Amnesty International’s condemnation of the SEAL strike in Abbottabad.) Scahill wants us to come away despising Obama; after closing this book, however, many readers may well feel better about the president than they did before.

Dirty Wars has proven to be timely in a way that neither the author nor his publisher can be very happy about. Noting that *Inspire*’s 2010 debut issue contained a “Hit List” of artists who had caricatured the prophet, an article by Awlaki “encouraging Muslims to attack those who defame the image of Muhammad,” and a piece entitled “Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom,” which explained how to construct an explosive device from a pressure cooker, Scahill acknowledges American intelligence concerns that such materials might “incite young Western Muslims to commit ‘lone wolf’ acts of terror”—although the only concern Scahill himself displays is over Awlaki’s continued well-being. As it happens, *Inspire*’s bomb recipe has been cited as a probable resource for the perpetrators of the Boston Marathon bombings, and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev has admitted that both he and his brother were influenced by recordings of Awlaki’s sermons.

What Scahill has given us here is, in short, an indictment of the West’s entire post-9/11 struggle against jihad. To offer serious criticism of American strategy is, of course, thoroughly legitimate. But Scahill isn’t a patriot who wants to see America triumph. On the contrary, it seems clear that the only thing he would hate more than a mismanaged war on jihad would be a successful one. Indeed, it’s hard to avoid feeling that this book’s definitive goal, like that of Awlaki’s sermons, is to swell the jihadist ranks—anything to bring down the Evil Empire with which Scahill has been at war all his professional life. ♦

Nightingale's Song

The collected versatility of a 'really good' critic.

BY JOHN SIMON

Drama critics come in all kinds, besides, of course, good and bad. There are those who regurgitate the plot and those who gallop off on hobby-horses. There are those with sound ideas but no style; those with impressive styles but no taste. Some tergiversate, even without a Janus face; others ride one point into the ground. Then there are the really good ones, like Britain's Benedict Nightingale, whose song should be heard far beyond Berkeley Square.

And so it pointedly can be with this collection of new critical pieces, some of which are based on past reviews but go further and deeper than the contemporaneous notices I pleasurable read in the *New York Times* on Sundays during his all-too-brief incumbency from 1983-84. Stimulating they were, like his longtime reviews in the *Times* of London—and often also in the *New Statesman*, the *Guardian*, and elsewhere. Enjoyable, too, was his memoir of Sunday-critic life in New York, *Fifth Row Center: A Critic's Year On and Off Broadway* (1986), but it is this broader and deeper new book that confirms his status as one of the best in a pullulating field.

The 103 little essays, each one centering on an important opening night, constitute a panorama that extends from *The Oresteia* of Aeschylus (458 B.C.) to Jez Butterworth's *Jerusalem* (2009 A.D.)—covering works and productions of just about every significant Anglophone dramatist, as well as those of a good many Europeans. The title's "great moments" are a trifle misleading: These remarkable, com-

**Great Moments
in the Theatre**
by Benedict Nightingale
Oberon, 272 pp., \$26.95



Benedict Nightingale

pact pieces do not view "moments" as literal minute incidents, but as momentous events and achievements of lasting importance.

And not, usually, of single plays only. Generally, these moments lead to mature and incisive discussions of entire oeuvres and careers, little-known but piquant production details, spectacular or disastrous performances, backstage scandals and existential vicissitudes, gifted directors, stupid censors, and perceptive as well as comically inept critics. All this bolstered by fascinating behind-the-scenes tidbits, wildly comic anecdotes, bizarre audience responses, and artistic, historic, and philosophical speculations that provide supplementary insights in wonderfully rounded, highly literate prose.

John Simon is an author and critic living in New York.

Not being 2,000-plus years old or geographically ubiquitous, Nightingale relies for early or distant opening nights on written accounts by others; but he manages to boil down exhaustive readings into vivid pages as pregnant and lively as firsthand reports. These can involve such instances as the 1849 war between England's starry actor William Macready and America's equally stellar Edwin Forrest. (The former was pelted in Philadelphia with rotten eggs and in Cincinnati with half a sheep, and the two of them performed rival *Macbeths* in nearby Manhattan theaters, eliciting 20,000 stone-throwing rioters, up to 30 corpses, and many wounded.) Or they transport us to 1868 in Moscow, where Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* tremblingly opens after a hissed fiasco in St. Petersburg that had the author escaping "with his overcoat collar hiding his face" and his health worsened.

But things really get rolling when we reach Nightingale's personal involvement as spectator or reviewer, where, in two pages, he can leave us totally immersed, entertained, and enriched, whether we are dedicated theatergoers or merely interested readers.

Though these pieces are mostly laudatory, the author can be very funny in occasional mockery. Take the item about a show called *Twang!!*, in which he allows that picking the worst musical is tricky because of intense competition. He evokes the terrible *Marilyn*, with its chorus of purple-clad plumb-ers feting Monroe in her bubble bath. Or *Fields of Ambrosia*, with "a chorus of Southern belles celebrating the death of a young man strapped into an electric chair behind them." He wonders: "Did I really hear a sadistic prison warden sing 'Your ass is too good to fry' before assaulting a German murderer called Gretchen," or herself sing as she "prowled in her cage on Death Row . . . 'Do it, boy, fry me while I'm hot'?"

There are more, similar recollections, as Nightingale always provides pungent peripheral stuff before he gets to his main subject, here *Twang!!*, an absurd Robin Hood story about whose ludicrous rehearsals Nightingale is hilarious, ending with citing

James Ilman

its “number in which medieval beauties begged for a locksmith to undo their chastity belts.”

But how neat is this, about *Mother Courage and Her Children* and Bertolt Brecht’s undependable alienation effect?

The irony was that [the spectators] were moved in what Brecht thought was the wrong way. That they were stirred by the altruism of Katrin, who had been left dumb and disfigured by violent soldiers was fine by him. But to see *Mother Courage* as a gallant survivor? That flouted his intentions—which was why Weigel, who was Brecht’s wife, had inserted business specifically but not quite successfully designed to desentimentalize her.

Perhaps the quickest way to convey Nightingale’s aptitude is to cite evocations of great performances. Here he is about Kevin Spacey as the salesman Hickey in Eugene O’Neill’s *The Iceman Cometh*:

Such were his skills that today he’d be successfully running encounter groups or an evangelical cable channel or a sinister new cult. Joshing, eyeballing, taking his victims by their shoulders and stroking them like some fundamentalist healer, refusing to rise to their taunts or buy their excuses, Spacey radiated laid-back charm and smiling self-belief; yet there was a coldness behind the affable grin, a hollowness inside the steel, an unease below the confidence, a danger that surfaced when he outed himself as the most destructive pipe-dreamer of all.

Or take this, about Eileen Atkins, whom, perhaps even above his admired Barbara Jefford, Vanessa Redgrave, Helen Mirren, and Judi Dench, he celebrates at the climax of her Hannah in Tennessee Williams’s *The Night of the Iguana*:

Throughout, she had managed to be astringent without becoming austere, rigorous but not cold, grave but not sententious, precise but not severe, unsmiling yet outgoing, emotionally generous and humane. But at this point she seemed to move into another dimension, her long, pale face shining in the moonlight as she said, and meant, that “nothing human disgusts me unless it is unkind or violent.” She had

plumbed the depths, seen the darkness, and emerged with a hard-won charity and belief in endurance. The oddball mystery of the moment, seeming as it did to reconcile the two sides of Williams’s own divided psyche, held the first-night audience rapt. As it did me.

How aptly this unites the actress with the author, about whom the piece previously goes into poignant biographical and psychological details.

I wish I could reproduce here, as examples of that rare thing, an absolutely perfect critique—a couple of the numerous exemplary essays. One is of Terence Rattigan’s *The Deep Blue Sea*, but extends into a discussion of that playwright’s (and human being’s) misery and grandeur, thus helping to rehabilitate a career that Kenneth Tynan and others had cruelly sabotaged. Or the piece about *Quartermaine’s Terms* and Simon Gray, whose plays

burrow into the emotional interstices of people, examining the yearnings, griefs, treacheries, self-deceptions, cruelties, resentments, feelings of failure and (sometimes) clumsy kindnesses with humor and incisiveness, and a depth few modern British dramatists could touch.

Or what about the brilliant accounts of works by his beloved Chekhov and Brian Friel; or the four pieces each on various *Hamlets* and *Macbeths*, all different yet equally illuminating? And so much more.

Please do not assume that this praise is elicited by a very slight, long-past contact with Benedict Nightingale, or is an ultimate attempt to repossess a Dior umbrella forgotten in the trunk of the Nightingale car and not recovered despite repeatedly unheeded requests. Critics are notoriously consumed with petty rivalries, so excessive encomia for one another can compete in frequency with hens’ teeth and must represent overwhelming compulsion.

Nor am I in a rare, slavish agreement here with a kindred spirit. I do not countenance his high regard for America’s Living Theater, England’s Theatre de Complicite, or Canada’s Robert Lepage—or for that matter, share his enthusiasm for Harold Pinter, Federico García Lorca, or Arthur Miller. But such differences are finally irrelevant. I admire the man, who is happily still with us, and his pleasant voice, which, like the voices of Heraclitus’ nightingales in William Cory’s famous poem, not even Death could take away. ♦

Words at Play

Cracking the code of the Workshop for Potential Literature. BY SARA LODGE

Did you hear about the Oulipian stripper? She delivered a lipogram before vanishing, with an invisible wink.

If this joke means nothing to you, then you are—like myself and 99.9 percent of other humans—not

Sara Lodge, a senior lecturer in English at the University of St Andrews, is the author of Thomas Hood and Nineteenth-Century Poetry: Work, Play, and Politics.

Many Subtle Channels
In Praise of Potential Literature
by Daniel Levin Becker
Harvard, 352 pp., \$27.95

a member of the exclusive club of verbal wrestlers, jugglers, and tight-rope-walkers who call themselves the OuLiPo, the *Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle*, or Workshop for Potential Literature. The OuLiPo has a quasi-

mythical cult status in France, partly because it is so exclusive (asking to join automatically debars you from membership) and because its 38 members have included Marcel Duchamp, Italo Calvino, and Georges Perec—leading lights in the avant-garde of postmodern art, philosophy, and fiction.

Luckily, a young Yale graduate called Daniel Levin Becker has gained membership in this mysterious enclave, only the second American ever to do so. In *Many Subtle Channels*, he reports from the frontier about the cultural antics of a group that has stimulated some of the most influential as well as some of the most frivolous works of European literature. Becker is clearly entranced by the OuLiPo, and his likably geeky fascination both with its annals and its ongoing activities draws readers in, until we are persuaded that, despite its reputation as a historical coterie, the OuLiPo's ideas remain alive and offer something of potential value to everyone.

The OuLiPo was founded in Paris in 1960 as an invitation-only supper club by Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais, both polymath writers who wanted to explore the multidimensional possibilities of writing through inquiry and experimentation. A key feature of the experiments would be structural “constraints”: schemes and forms designed, through limitation, to force the mind into agile, creative responses. A lipogram, for example, is a text that deliberately excludes one or more letters. (The most famous example is Georges Perec's detective novel, *The Disappearance*, which does not use the letter “e.”) As Becker explains, the OuLiPo is precise about what it is not:

It is not a movement, or an -ism, or a school. It does not have an agenda,

aesthetic or political or otherwise. . . . [I]t does not purport to tell anyone what literature should or must be. What it does is tell anyone who cares to listen about what literature *could* and *might* be, sometimes by speculation, other times by demonstration.

Oulipians come from different walks of life—computer programming, telecommunications, poetry, philosophy—and each will approach



Raymond Queneau in a photo booth, ca. 1929

differently the questions of what literature could be, and what could be literature. The mesh of scientists and writers is important. The early members of the OuLiPo were particularly fascinated by the linkages between mathematics and language. One of the first “Oulipian” works Queneau produced is *A Hundred Thousand Billion Poems*. It is a book of 10 sonnets, each with 14 lines of identical scansion and end-rhyme (chemise, frise, marquise). Each poem fits onto a page, cut into 14 strips: one for each line. The idea is that, gingerly flipping the strips back and forward—as you may have done in childhood to create animals with varying heads, bodies, and tails—you can create 100 billion potential poems. It is a small, but also practically bottomless, text.

Later works, like Italo Calvino's *If On a Winter's Night a Traveller* and Georges Perec's *Life A User's Manual*, employ more subtle numerical codes to structure their narratives. Calvino's

novel makes you, the reader, the protagonist of his story. You discover the beginnings of different texts in various genres and styles—but each time, just as you start to be sucked into the particular tale, it breaks off. The remaining pages are missing and your pursuit of them involves increasingly desperate visits to a bookshop, a publisher, and jail. Like Scheherazade, Calvino teases us with the *coitus interruptus* of the infinitely deferred story, bringing us back to a consciousness of the process of reading as a self-referential adventure. Such Oulipian texts allow us to enjoy imaginatively what is *not* there, as much as what is; they also revel in the potential accidents that constantly occur in and to writing. As Calvino muses:

It is only through the confining act of writing that the immensity of the nonwritten becomes legible, that is, through the uncertainties of spelling, the occasional lapses, oversights, unchecked leaps of the word and pen.

Anyone who has ever seen a sign in the street reading “Bill Stickers will be Prosecuted” and has felt tempted to add the time-honored retort “Bill Stickers is Innocent!” has experienced the protean energy of language, which allows it to say more than we intend. Oulipians love to expose and embrace the “accidental” pun, the “misspelling” that turns out to be full of suggestive meanings. Attempts at censorship inevitably speak of the very matters they seek to repress. Oulipians are drawn to exploring, via literature, the paradoxical relationship between limitation and freedom.

In the immediate postwar period, that relationship was fraught with historical significance. Like Calvino, François Le Lionnais—cofounder of

the OuLiPo—had been a member of the Resistance. Le Lionnais, by profession an industrial chemist, was interrogated, tortured, and put to work designing (and sometimes sabotaging) V2 missiles for the Germans. He was sent to concentration camps at Buchenwald and Dora-Mittelbau. He survived by reconstructing, in his mind's eye, in astonishing detail, favorite paintings that he had seen. He then imagined characters from one masterpiece visiting and interacting with ones in another. He countered the physical confines of imprisonment by creating an imaginative plane in which the boundaries of art—time, materiality, the distinctness of the individual work—dissolved.

The OuLiPo was born over a decade later, but its playful, yet serious, post-modern experimentation can in part be traced to the need for escape and renewal that the trauma of Nazi occupation produced. That Oulipians are “rats who build the labyrinth from which they plan to escape” is a powerful metaphor for citizens choosing to revisit, by their own volition, the notion of constraint as a source of artistic power.

Becker’s account of the OuLiPo begins with the 2008 funeral of an Oulipian, François Caradec, and introduces us, with wry observation, to the current characters and workings of the Oulipian group. He then doubles back to offer us a history of the OuLiPo, his experience of working as a volunteer cataloguer of its archives, and his induction to its practices. Becker is a shrewd and entertaining writer: His youthful enthusiasm is infectious and his style, which has hints of modern American intellectual goofballers such as David Foster Wallace, combines the erudite with a cheerfully self-conscious admission of obsessive word-nerdiness. His footnotes become impressive, digressive asides. He confesses to having edited graffiti in bathroom stalls and to having “jeopardized romantic relationships by correcting completely inconsequential confusions of *which* and *that*.” Among the Oulipian projects he dreams of completing is a cycle of stories whose themes

are determined by their word count.

While not everyone will share Becker’s fanatical delight in the formal patterns of language and the “coolness” of constrained writing, his insistence that this type of writing can open unexpected creative doors is persuasive. We are all familiar with the sonnet, the haiku, perhaps also the sestina: limited poetic forms with strict rules that inspire writers. But why not try creating a *sardinosaur*, a *poème de métro*, or a *beau présent*?

A *sardinosaur* is a composite literary animal, an “inter-species lovechild,” in which the tail of one creature is shared with the beginning of another. Thus, you might populate your imagination with antelopossums, ocelotters, or camelephants.

A *poème de métro* is a free-verse form with rigid compositional rules. When you board the metro train, you compose the first line of a poem. When the train makes its first stop, you write the line down. When the train starts moving again, you compose the second line. At the second stop you must write it down. You can’t compose while the train is stopped or write anything down while it is moving. You write the last line when you arrive at your destination. According to Becker, it is “surprisingly challenging” since the time strictures make it “like a suicide-aerobics drill for the parts of your mind that usually make observations into ruminations and ruminations into language.”

A *beau présent*, meanwhile, is a poem that contains only the letters in the recipient’s name. Writing one for Malcolm X would thus pose a challenge. But writing one for Daniel Levin Becker is a breeze. To prove it, I had a go myself:

*Carved in red and black
A riddle
I revealed.
Driven live and
Never end.*

If Oulipian constraints are labyrinths from which one must escape, then this may be the starter version, where almost every path leads to an exit.

Oulipians argue, reasonably enough, that all language works by imposing codes and limitations, through alphabets and certain conventions about what counts as a word and how communication is structured. Once you become aware of the possible complexity of the codes underlying the structure of literary works, then your eyes will become sharper and brighter. You will become a literary detective, always looking for pattern—for Fibonacci sequences embedded in the first lines of novels, for cereal box advertisements that are accidental haikus. This is part of the point of reading and writing in the Oulipian spirit. It makes us aware of potentiality in every crook and nanny.

Becker’s account of the OuLiPo is not seamless. It starts out with the wit and verve of a piece of literary journalism, but in places has the finicky attention to detail of a graduate thesis. Not all readers will be equally fascinated by the enumeration of the many different organizations that have spun off from OuLiPo: the OuMuPo (workshop of potential music), OuBaPo (comic strip artists), and OuFlarfPo (poets who generate poetry with the aid of search engines). This may, then, only be a book to rush out and buy if you already are (or know) the kind of person who is susceptible to the flicker of the Oulipian flame, someone who enjoys leaping the hurdles of a cryptic crossword, can fire a pun, and run an acrostic.

But Becker is set to join the select band of triple-barreled American authors (David Foster Wallace, Jonathan Safran Foer) who write hip books with weird titles that are nonetheless engaging. I, for one, am so intrigued by the knowledge that the OuLiPo is still alive—and that this odd group of intellectuals regularly meets to air its experiments—that I am tempted to visit Paris to attend one of their Thursday open sessions, where members of the public can watch.

Let’s face it: We all need a serious, intellectual reason to visit Paris. I’ll be the one in the third row from the back with a T-shirt that says “Don’t Feed the Crocodilettante.” ♦

Picture Perfect

How the Master saw the outsider's inner life.

BY EDWIN M. YODER JR.



Nicole Kidman as Isabel Archer (1996)

By all but universal agreement, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) was Henry James's first masterpiece, a lengthy contemplation of the fate of an orphaned American girl who falls victim to European manners and morals—the first great articulation of his “international theme.”

Inveterate James enthusiasts, sometimes playfully known as Jacobites, concede that even some sophisticated readers find James hard going; Michael Gorra's fine study ought to help. James's early stories are unremarkable, but the author was not slow to see this, and moved to remedy their defects. The result was a prodigious growth of his art and craft which produced *Portrait* (as we shall call it) before he turned 40. A disappointing attempt to transform himself into a playwright in the following decade

Edwin M. Yoder Jr. wrote about Henry James in his novel *Lions at Lamb House* (2007).

Portrait of a Novel
Henry James and the Making of an American Masterpiece
 by Michael Gorra
 Liveright, 416 pp., \$29.95

failed, but, by a mysterious rule of compensation, the experience taught him lessons that would enrich his “late style,” whose difficulties are considerable and thus erect new barriers for the common reader.

As for the technique of *Portrait*, James explains in the preface he wrote for his 1906 revision (whose emendations of the original text cover some 80 pages in one standard edition) that he had learned from the great Russian storyteller Ivan Turgenev to begin with a distinct person and imagine where her personality would take her, instead of imagining a plot and peopling it with characters.

Isabel Archer, the heroine of *Portrait*, is one of many young women

in James's fiction who are victimized, sometimes with their own unintended help, by the predatory plotting of those they believe they can trust. The tale relies on our belief (or suspension of disbelief) in a 19th-century world where divorce is banned or disreputable and where so-called bastards are condemned, unless they have the luck to be the offspring of kings or Roman cardinals, and even though they had no hand in their begetting. Not least, women had yet to emancipate themselves from patriarchal domination, and marriage vows demanded virtue and obedience of wives, if not of husbands. Those vows become a big part of Isabel's dilemma; she takes them seriously indeed.

Among Jamesian heroines, Isabel Archer is arguably the most innocent. Her idealism, as she “affronts” her destiny—the verb is significant—echoes the high registers of the American Puritan tradition. She trusts a circle of new European friends whom the adult reader today quickly identifies as designing and mischievous, including the man she marries. Through the generosity of a well-meaning cousin who admires her freshness and ambition, she has been endowed with a fortune that predictably exposes her to fortune-hunters. She rejects two admirable suitors, an English viscount and a young American entrepreneur, to give her hand to an aestheticized and deracinated fop, Gilbert Osmond, originally from Baltimore, who dwells among his bibelots on a Florence hilltop. She is warned that this marriage will trap her in the conventionalities she is fleeing. But she is so nobly blind to underhanded motives that she refuses to listen to cautionary words that would shock her ingénue stepdaughter, Pansy.

Henry James never wrote a bald or obvious tale. He transmutes what could pass for melodrama into a penetrating exploration of an evolving consciousness: Isabel's rueful growth into understanding. Gorra writes that *Portrait* is a bridge to modernism, a pioneering study in human interiority that would later undergo further development by Faulkner,

Joyce, Woolf, and others. No less a critic than F.R. Leavis pronounced it one of the two greatest novels in the language, and even those who question such an exalted designation find it irresistible. So great is Isabel's high-minded cluelessness that, having at last surmised that her husband despises her for her "ideas" (that is, her originality and social adventurousness), her giddy but kind sister-in-law has to spell out the truth for her: Osmond has married her for her money; his mysterious friend and intermediary Madame Merle is actually Osmond's mistress and Pansy is their illegitimate offspring; and Merle's aspiration is to endow Pansy with a dowry that will win her a brilliant marriage.

Well might Isabel's informant exclaim, in the face of her naïveté, "With you, my dear, one must always do one's i's."

James wrote many intricate stories, long and short, but never a better one than *Portrait*. It is a counter-Columbian parable in which Isabel Archer, seeking personal liberation, tries to avoid the snares of class, race, money, and history; the ultimate irony is that she cannot. In her ambition to escape these ensnaring forces, Isabel is blinded by Gilbert Osmond's subtle, sophisticated, and retiring manner, and misses his caddishness and will to dominate. Hers is not a failure of intelligence or sensibility—she is richly endowed with both. It is a deficit of worldly experience and savoir-faire which leads her to assist in her own entrapment.

Once her illusions fall away, Isabel defies Osmond and goes back to England, to the bedside of her dying cousin, but her future is left uncertain. She has promised Pansy (now buried in a convent by her father to prevent a marriage he disapproves of) to come back to Rome, and presumably does so, having again rebuffed the advances of her American friend Caspar Goodwood—but not before experiencing a blinding burst of physical passion when he kisses her farewell. Her future is left unexplored, however—to the displeasure of many readers.

Anyone who writes about Henry James, especially regarding a book as complex as *Portrait*, must be granted license and amplitude. Michael Gorra exploits them to the full, although his very readable guide and exposition are at times a bit overfurnished with tangents, repetition, and duplication. He is nonetheless a fine critic and never sounds those off-key notes now so common in academic criticism. Gorra finds it necessary to tip his hat briefly to the consuming prurience about James's sexuality, though he never pretends that we can penetrate the Victorian silence that surrounds it. Sexuality would seem to be of some

relevance to James's tales of young women, especially in a story focused on a calamitous marriage. We know that he was haunted all his adult life by the tragic early death of a brilliant cousin, Minnie Temple, and no doubt her memory figured in his conception of Isabel Archer and others.

Gorra's *Portrait of a Novel* is a masterly treatment of a great book. For readers who find Henry James difficult, it is an ideal primer, with its focus on James's unsurpassed ability to enter the thoughts of his characters and propel his tales through that inner theater of consciousness which he may claim to have invented. ♦



Truth to Tell

A 35th-anniversary revision of a Cold War classic.

BY RONALD RADOSH

The historian Allen Weinstein has had, by any standard, an illustrious career.

For some years, he was a professor of history at Smith. Moving on, he created and served as director of the Center for Democracy, which promoted democracy abroad and played a major role in validating the critical election in the Philippines that led to the demise of the Marcos dictatorship and helped Boris Yeltsin during the downfall of the Soviet Union. He was also a member of the editorial board of the *Washington Post* and served as archivist of the United States during 2005-08.

These achievements are outstanding, but his most significant contribution was writing the pathbreaking account of the Hiss-Chambers case, *Perjury*, first published by Knopf in 1978. A revised edition of this classic has now been published by the Hoover

Perjury

The Hiss-Chambers Case
by Allen Weinstein
Hoover Institution, 766 pp., \$24.95

Institution, which serves as the repository for Weinstein's papers, including those related to the work he did while preparing *Perjury* in the 1970s.

An entire generation has come of age knowing little, if anything, about the Hiss case, its significance during the Cold War, and its repercussions in American life. Now, with the addition of interviews and profiles of significant figures involved, today's students of history can discover for themselves the importance of the case and why so many had their assumptions shattered upon *Perjury*'s appearance.

Of course, Weinstein started out believing that Alger Hiss was innocent and had likely been framed—a largely standard belief for liberal intellectuals of the day, who loathed Richard Nixon. As a member of the

Ronald Radosh is coauthor, with Allis Radosh, of *Red Star Over Hollywood: The Film Colony's Long Romance with the Left*.



Allen Weinstein, Bill Clinton in Little Rock, Arkansas (2005)

House Committee on Un-American Activities, Nixon had come to believe that Hiss's accuser, Whittaker Chambers, and not Hiss, was the man telling the truth when testifying before the committee.

Alger Hiss was a former State Department official who had accompanied President Franklin Roosevelt to the Yalta Conference and who, when Chambers accused him of espionage, was director of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Had Hiss actually spied for the Soviet Union in the 1930s (as Chambers claimed), many liberals believed that conservatives might succeed in their attempt to tarnish the reputation of American liberalism in its heyday. Indeed, rather than accept the evidence indicating that Hiss *had* been working for the Soviets, mainstream liberal spokesmen believed that Hiss had been framed by Republicans looking to use the case to smear the administrations of FDR and Harry Truman. Dean Acheson, Truman's secretary of state, defended Hiss, and Truman referred to the Hiss trial as a "red herring."

Hiss's conviction of perjury in his second trial—the espionage statute

having expired—led most Americans to believe that Hiss had been guilty of spying for Stalin. The liberal mainstream, however, continued to argue that Hiss was innocent, and backed up Hiss's own professions of innocence with scores of books and articles over the years positing how the conspiracy to frame Hiss had been put in place. We learned about "forgery by typewriter," supposedly false testimony by Whittaker Chambers, and numerous explanations of how the (Truman!) Justice Department fabricated its case.

When Weinstein first published *Perjury*, the impact was enormous. But the road ahead was paved with obstacles. Nixon refused to be interviewed when Weinstein traveled to San Clemente in 1975: His aide told Weinstein that Nixon wasn't "seeing people of your ilk yet." Years later, when Weinstein bumped into a semi-rehabilitated Nixon at the Chinese embassy, Nixon strode up to him and, turning to Weinstein's wife, said: "Gutsy fellow, your husband. It took courage to write that book."

To understand just how much courage it took for Weinstein to change his original assumption about

Hiss's innocence, and to follow where the evidence led him, we have to recall how much was at stake for liberals in defending Hiss. After all, Alger Hiss had appeared to serve with distinction in various New Deal agencies before moving to the Department of State; he was one of the legions of idealistic public servants who came to Washington to serve the new reform-minded administration. As Weinstein puts it in his new introduction,

[M]any of the left-liberals growing up in the Silent Fifties were well disposed to believe Hiss's version of events. His innocence

was a matter of faith, if only because Chambers, Nixon, [J. Edgar] Hoover and others on the anti-Communist right were his political enemies. Hiss's fate symbolized for young liberals the quintessence of McCarthyism, its paranoid fear of any public figure to the left of Dwight Eisenhower.

Much of the opposition to Weinstein, however, derived not from the facts uncovered by his work, but from the need to demonize his findings lest the public realize that there really *was* an internal Soviet apparatus seeking to discover our nation's top secrets. And primary in that effort was the *Nation*, which editorialized that Weinstein had "misquoted and misrepresented" sources and written "false history." Weinstein, added the *Nation*, had "aligned himself with those Cold War intellectuals who presumably sleep better at night secure in the knowledge that there was an internal Communist espionage menace."

Allen Weinstein withstood those attacks, and with grace and firmness. Now a new generation has the chance to acquaint itself with a work that changed our view of the past and made history.

Characters Count

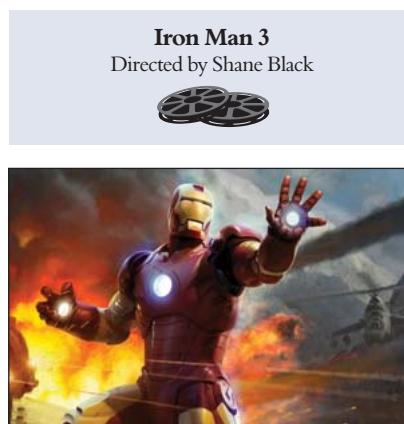
An infinite number of explosions gets you only so far.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

The signal irony of the special-effects blockbusters that now dominate American moviegoing is this: Their dazzling computer-generated imagery has rendered them entirely interchangeable. They all feature the destruction of colossal swaths of real estate, depicted so realistically you don't even need to suspend a moment's disbelief. But then, who can remember which one of the 25 sci-fi megapictures from last year featured the evisceration of a Chicago office building by a snake-like alien robot? Watching *Iron Man 3*, the latest \$200 million production, I could have sworn I'd seen its climactic battle—set in and around an oil tanker—several times before.

If I'm entirely blasé about these sequences, I can only imagine that the teenage boys (and the twentysomething males indistinguishable from teenage boys) at whom they're aimed must be feeling the mind-numbing sameness more than I do. So what is it that makes the blockbuster experience so memorable, even now, that the moviegoing audience is willing to attend them almost en masse the weekend they open? (*Iron Man 3* made \$172 million on its opening weekend, an astounding 25 times more than the number two film.)

I don't think what they're waiting for is the infamous "money shot"—some iconic image getting blown up in a manner you haven't seen before. Directors torture themselves to come up with new places to ruin in new ways, but they've pretty much run out of monuments and whole cities they can reduce to rubble. *The Avengers* basically trashed Midtown Manhattan, and that



had already been done 15 years earlier in the dreadful remake of *Godzilla*, and four or five times since.

So what was it that made *The Avengers* last year's most successful film? The fans didn't return time after time to wonder anew at the smashing of Midtown. They came to hear the stolid Captain America turning to a 10-foot-tall green giant and saying, in a perfect deadpan, "Hulk, smash." They reveled in the Hulk, out of nowhere, punching the Norse deity Thor out of the picture frame and muttering something indecipherably rude out of the side of his mouth. And they loved it when Robert Downey Jr., playing Iron Man as he had in the first two films of the name and in this newest one, responded to the villain's declaration that he had an entire army at his disposal with the words, "We have a Hulk."

What all these moments had in common is that they were unexpected. They had levity and grace, all the more so because they interrupted a series of frenetic action sequences that, in their relentlessness, would have turned enervatingly banal without them.

So what the audiences crave is not action-movie sameness, but character-driven idiosyncrasies. The new money

shot is a character bit. The transformative moment in this regard for the summer blockbuster was the inspired casting of Johnny Depp in Disney's seemingly ludicrous notion of turning its *Pirates of the Caribbean* ride into a movie franchise in 2003. Depp was, at the time, a remarkably versatile but annoyingly pretentious actor whose peculiar taste for material had made him box office poison. He grabbed onto the role of Jack Sparrow and, from scratch, built an unforgettably charismatic oddball character who carried four films entirely on his own shoulders—thus almost single-handedly earning a combined \$3.7 billion worldwide. In the process, Depp—who had never been in a big hit in his 12 years as a leading man—became the biggest star in the world.

Depp's example inspired Marvel to hire another brilliant and highly problematic performer who had spent a decade of his life spiraling downward into multiple drug addictions. Robert Downey Jr. could not get work because he was deemed uninsurable and had stitched together a second career in TV shows and small films. In 2008, he was cast as Iron Man, and his dazzling comic heroics made him an instant superstar.

Playing a sybaritic genius who takes great gusto in enjoying the fruits of his wealth, Downey created a character no less indelible than Depp's. *Iron Man 3* marks his fourth turn as Tony Stark, and it's remarkable that he is able to find new ways to please a mass audience—in this one, by forming an unlikely and charming bond with a 9-year-old boy in a town in Tennessee whom he treats like an equal.

People come to *Iron Man 3* because they are now well trained to do so, and because, when they hear that Downey is playing Tony Stark again, they're pretty sure they're going to have a good time. It does not seem likely that they, or anybody else, would have the slightest interest in the film for any other reason—although there's a decent twist in the third act, regarding the true identity of the villain, that leads to an amazing scene featuring the great Ben Kingsley.

It's a character bit. People will want to see it again. The explosions they've seen already. ♦

John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, is THE WEEKLY STANDARD's movie critic.

"On Sunday's Reliable Sources, host Howard Kurtz was the one who took the grilling—following the recent controversy over his story about NBA player Jason Collins coming out as gay."

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CNN RELIABLE SOURCES

A Critical Lens on Howard Kurtz: Covering the New Boston Suspects

Aired May 5, 2013 - 11:00 ET

KURTZ: Welcome back to Reliable Sources. I'm Howard Kurtz. Joining us now in studio is media critic and the host of CNN's Reliable Sources, Howard Kurtz.

HOWARD KURTZ: Hi, Howard, thanks for having me.

KURTZ: Thanks for being here. So tipping off here, Howard, some controversy regarding Jason Collins and the host of CNN's Reliable Sources, Howard Kurtz. Collins went hard to the hole this week by coming out as the NBA's first openly gay player, and Kurtz double-dribbled his way through a column riddled with factual errors and made a video mocking Jason Collins's sexuality. So, Howard, was this a personal foul?

KURTZ: Flagrant foul! Two shots and the ball! The irony isn't lost on anyone that someone who calls himself a "media critic" would make such a public blunder, which raises an even more important question: Can Kurtz be trusted? If Kurtz is the one watching the media, well, then who is watching Kurtz?

KURTZ: If we only knew. To shed some light on this issue, joining us now is the author of the column in question, former Daily Beast columnist and the host of CNN's Reliable Sources, Howard Kurtz. Howard.

HOWARD KURTZ: Howard.

KURTZ: Howard.

KURTZ: Howard.

KURTZ: Howard.

KURTZ: Well, Howard, you're a longtime colleague, a friend of the show, but we've got a job to do here. We're not going to mince words. What were you thinking?

KURTZ: Well, Howard and Howard: I wasn't thinking. I didn't do my job properly. I like to think of myself as a referee at a basketball game: If somebody commits a foul, or travels, or goes out of bounds, I blow my whistle and make sure the rules are followed. But sometimes, the play happens too fast, and I don't get a clear view, and I blow the call. Jason Collins made a slam dunk, and I called a charge on him. But I was the one who charged. I charged. And for that, I am sorry.

KURTZ: Excellent metaphor, heartfelt apology. But is it enough? Let's see what Twitter has to say: @HowardKurtz tweeted: "Excellent metaphor, heartfelt apology. But is it enough? Let's see what Twitter has to say #stillareliablesource?" Coming up on Reliable Sources: More with Howard Kurtz and Howard Kurtz, and a very special guest appearance by Howard Kurtz. Back after these messages.



Coming soon on **FS** RELIABLE SOURCES
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